

UK teacher shortages on the rise

Tom Pearce
19 March 2016

The failure of the Conservative-led UK government to achieve its target for teacher recruitment for the fourth year in a row is symptomatic of the crisis arising from dictatorial conditions and extreme governmental pressure.

Research by the National Audit Office found that over a 10-year period approximately 12 percent of newly qualified teachers left state-funded schools within one year of joining while 28 percent had left within five years.

The Department for Education's (DfE) recruitment targets are not being met, with the recorded rate of vacancies and temporarily filled positions in schools doubling between 2011 and 2014. As a result, there have been cases of schools having to share staff and use unqualified teachers and support staff. This has led to further pressure on staff, with nine out of 10 saying it is generating a high level of workload.

The government claims it will invest £1.3 billion up to 2020 to attract new teachers where they are most needed. However, it is now harder to recruit teachers than 12 months ago, with a survey of 900 head teachers finding that 90 percent are finding it hard to recruit.

The situation is being exacerbated by teachers not just leaving the profession, but leaving the UK as well. Data from International School Consultancy (ISC) reveals that over the past year, 18,000 teachers left the UK to teach abroad. Statistics show that the number of teachers leaving the UK is on the rise. In 2013, the number was at 82,000 and during 2014-15 about 100,000 teachers left the UK.

The number is more significant if you compare this with the number of teachers that achieved qualified teaching status (QTS) in universities. According to the latest figures for the 2013-14 academic year, this was at 17,001. This is leading to an enormous staffing crisis as teachers are leaving the profession in higher numbers than are being trained.

The DfE responded to the staffing crisis with the same rhetoric, that it is "determined to continue raising the status of the profession." The DfE claims it has "given schools unprecedented freedom over staff pay, to allow them to attract the brightest and the best."

However, the effect of changes of funding to school budgets has led to schools using this freedom to refuse pay progression and cut services. This has led to the demotivation of staff that feel ignored and divided by performance-related pay. The pay change has led to some schools setting unrealistic targets for teachers to achieve pay increments. In some cases, middle leaders, i.e., heads of subjects, have been told their pay depends on the performance of other colleagues in their department. The teaching unions have overseen these measures.

The chief inspector of official schools inspectorate Ofsted in England, Sir Michael Wilshaw, has warned of a "teacher brain drain" at a time when schools across the country are already struggling to fill vacancies amid rising numbers of pupils.

He said teachers are "Lured by enticing offers of competitive, tax-free salaries, free accommodation and a warmer climate, teachers are taking their hard-earned qualifications to the Gulf states".

This writer spoke to teachers in Cambridgeshire. One teacher had recently taken a post in Dubai. He decided to leave the UK because of "his interest in travelling but also for financial reasons with international schools offering a package that pays for accommodation and flights each year." He added there was "less pressure on teachers in international schools" in sharp comparison to Ofsted government-set test targets.

Another teacher said, "The government's target driven curriculum was putting too much pressure on teachers to mark and assess." Many teachers spoken to had considered the idea of leaving the country in the past year with the main reasons for leaving being

“stress and unnecessary pressures.”

Over the past decade, the grading standards that Ofsted use has been raised and schools are under immense pressure to be “outstanding”. As a result, teaching leaders have strived tirelessly for an outstanding verdict, placing incredible levels of pressure on their staff. In some cases, unreasonable standards of marking and assessment have been enforced on staff in the name of showing Ofsted that they are progressing towards the outstanding rating. Consequently, teachers are showing their disgust by rejecting these conditions and leaving the profession to find employment outside the UK.

Wilshaw has called in the past, and repeated again, the idea of financial incentives in the form of “golden handcuffs” to ensure trainees start their teaching career in areas where they are needed most. “As far as I’m concerned, that means Barnsley not Bangkok, Doncaster not Doha, and King’s Lynn not Kuala Lumpur.”

His reactionary and nationalist agenda is outlined in his damning view of international schools. He continued: “Is it fair that the offspring of overseas oligarchs are directly benefiting from UK teacher training programmes at the expense of poor children in large parts of this country?”

Wilshaw’s policy is largely welcomed by teachers’ leaders, including headteachers, principals, deputy heads and vice-principals. They suggest the government should write off teachers’ university tuition fees as an incentive to keep newly qualified teachers in English state schools. Leora Cruddas, director of policy at the Association of School and College Leaders, said, “The idea of ‘golden handcuffs’ to keep teachers in this country for a period of time is an interesting one which deserves more examination.”

The fact is teachers are not in the job to make large sums of money. Their pressurized working conditions are the main reason why teachers are leaving the profession and will continue to leave the country.

Ben Culverhouse, a teacher, writing in the *Guardian* believes the incentives “will do nothing to address the real problems afflicting our education system. These words of warning come from a man [Wilshaw] who was instrumental—along with Michael Gove [the Conservative governments’ former education secretary]—in creating the problems in the first place.

Wilshaw was instructed by Gove to raise standards not long after he took office in 2012.”

Culverhouse fails to mention the process has been continued since the replacement of Gove in a 2014 cabinet reshuffle, which was championed by the teachers unions and the pseudo-left Socialist Workers Party (SWP) as “an outstanding day for education”. The SWP called for workers to “come back in the autumn [2014] prepared to step up the fight to bury everything Gove stood for”. There has been no national strike action since that day.

The teaching union, National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT), released a toothless statement on the latest staffing crisis figures, in which General Secretary Chris Keates, said: “This is another stark consequence of government policy. The public education service is haemorrhaging teachers, not just to go abroad; equal numbers are leaving teaching to go to other more financially competitive jobs in this country.” But all the NASUWT has proposed in response to the government’s policy is a ludicrous “action short of strike action”, which involves advice on what not to do in the workplace.

The policies of Gove have not been buried. The government has held a consultation on workload that is not worth the paper it is printed on. The pressures that have led to an exodus of teachers continue, with no solutions offered by teachers unions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact