Recruiting, Retaining, and Supporting Teachers

A Summary of the Evidence for School Leaders

Contents

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Overview

High quality teaching is the most powerful lever we have to improve pupil learning. To make sure all pupils have access to excellent teaching, we must recruit strong candidates into the profession, support their development into highly effective teachers, and retain them in schools. Yet we know that teacher recruitment and retention is at crisis in England. In response, the EEF is committed to funding additional research on effective strategies for addressing this challenge. This summary brings together EEF research, along with relevant wider research, to outline the current evidence on teacher recruitment and retention. While there is a clear gap in evidence, there are several approaches that show promise.

Applying the summary to practice

See also our accompanying tool- **Supporting Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Reflection Tool** - designed for school leaders to use alongside this report. It offers question prompts and practical examples to support leaders to reflect on how the evidence in this summary could inform action.

Who is this for?

This summary is intended to help headteachers and senior leaders of primary and secondary schools and others making decisions about how to recruit and retain teachers. It aims to provide an accessible overview of the key evidence available on classroom teacher recruitment and retention.

What is it based on?

This summary draws primarily on the findings from five reviews and one experimental study commissioned by the EEF between 2022 and 2025.[1] The reports are available to read in full on the EEF website and details can also be found in the Appendix. Where helpful, we've supplemented findings from our research with additional recent evidence.

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[1] **'Scoping Review on Teacher Quality, Recruitment, and Retention'** (Taylor et al., 2023); 'Flexible Working Review' (Harland et al., 2023); 'Workload Review' (Martin et al., 2023); 'Leadership, Culture, and Climate Review' (Nguyen et al., 2023); 'Review of Recruitment and Retention in Disadvantaged Schools' (Chong et al., 2024); 'Teacher Recruitment Strategies Experimental Study' (Allen et al., 2025).

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Key findings

1. Teacher workload

Reducing teacher workload could be one of the most promising ways to boost retention.
- Teachers in schools with multiple workload strategies in place report more manageable workloads, suggesting a multi-pronged approach may work best.
- Common strategies currently used by schools include access to existing schemes of work, collaborative planning, and streamlined marking and feedback.
- Teachers want workload reduction to focus on lesson planning, marking, assessment and behaviour, and pastoral care.
- Generative AI shows early promise: a recent trial found using ChatGPT cut lesson planning time by 31%.
- School workload policy changes can initially raise workload as staff adapt. Leaders should time rollouts carefully and monitor both short- and long-term impacts.

2. Flexible working

Teachers value flexible working. When implemented well, it can improve job satisfaction and wellbeing.
- Flexible working is still rare in teaching but is becoming more common.
- While there's no direct evidence it improves retention, teachers consistently link being able to work flexibly to better wellbeing, motivation, and job satisfaction.
- Leaders should plan how to address common concerns like cost, teaching continuity, and career progression when introducing flexible working.
- Successful examples highlight the importance of supportive leadership, a whole-school, proactive approach, clearly defined responsibilities, effective timetabling, and a willingness to compromise.

3. School leadership, culture, and climate

Leadership practices that build trust, support professional growth, and foster a strong school culture could make a meaningful difference to teacher retention.
Research is still emerging, but leadership practices that show promise for retention include:
- Fostering a supportive working environment, including building positive and trusting relationships among staff.
- Prioritising teacher development, such as enabling access to professional learning.
- Promoting autonomy and agency by involving teachers in school decision-making.

4. Financial incentives and other benefits

Pay matters, especially for attracting teachers, but clearly defined benefits and working conditions also play a crucial role.
- Financial incentives are the best evidenced strategy for attracting teachers to schools. However, budget constraints make this challenging.
- Schools serving disadvantaged communities may need to offer higher pay to attract comparable candidates to other schools.
- Teachers value clearly defined workplace benefits-such as a specified amount of PPA time-more than vague or less tangible commitments such as broad statements about school culture or staff wellbeing.
- Some evidence suggests that offering healthcare benefits, childcare subsidies, or concrete flexible working commitments could be more cost-effective than pay rises in some cases.

1.   Introduction

The importance of recruiting and retaining teachers

Teacher retention is a major challenge in England. Almost one in three teachers leave within their first five years of teaching, rising to 43% within ten.[2] In 2023, around a third of teachers reported that they were considering leaving the profession, with 90% giving high workload as one of the main reasons.[3] Recruiting new teachers is also proving difficult: in 2023/2024, only 62% of the target for training new secondary teachers was met.[4]

Schools serving disadvantaged communities face a 'structural recruitment challenge', often finding it much harder to attract teachers.[5] They also tend to experience higher turnover and lower retention rates, meaning that disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately impacted by teacher shortages.[6] Since sustained access to great teaching makes a big difference to pupil outcomes, improving recruitment and retention in these schools is a key priority.

Successive UK governments have made recruiting and retaining high quality teachers a major focus, especially since the 2019 publication of the 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy'.[7] Key actions have included:

- **Financial incentives**—such as subject bursaries and early career payments.

- **Stronger professional development** (PD) pathways—including the Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQs).

- **Support tools and guidance**, such as the Workload Reduction Toolkit and Staff Wellbeing Charter.

The current government has pledged to recruit 6,500 additional teachers, supported by increased PD spending, accountability reforms, and expanded school-to-school support.

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[2] DfE, 2025
[3] DfE, 2024
[4] McLean and Worth, 2025.
[5] Allen et al., 2025, p.6
[6] Cardim-Dias et al., 2025.
[7] DfE, 2019.

2.   Teacher workload

What are schools doing to reduce teacher workload?

Schools are doing a lot to try to address teacher workload challenges, with most already implementing multiple strategies. The most common are shown in the table below. The variety of strategies used by schools reflects the fact that multiple factors are contributing to high workloads.

Workload management strategies used in English schools[8]

Workload management strategy	Percentage of schools using the strategy
Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) time [9]	97%
Access to existing schemes of work	91%
Collaborative planning	80%
Efficient marking and feedback (e.g. instant verbal feedback)	76%
Dedicated time for additional responsibilities (e.g. subject leadership)	75%
Computer software to support with administrative tasks	61%
Reduction in data drops	53%
Reduction in internal communications (e.g. a daily staff bulletin to reduce emails)	25%
A committee/system to monitor teacher workload (e.g. use of a school calendar available to all staff could be used to identify workload 'pinch points' in advance)	25%
Other time management strategies (e.g. reducing the frequency or length of staff meetings)	19%

School leaders are more likely than teachers to identify the workload management strategies in place at their schools, perhaps indicating that teachers are not always aware of the efforts being made to address workload concerns. This highlights the need for clearer communication within schools around the steps being taken to support teachers.

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[8] Survey data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[9] Although timetabled PPA time is a statutory requirement, 3% of respondents did not report that it was provided in their schools, possibly because they felt their time was not genuinely protected for PPA.

Although schools are using a range of strategies to tackle high workload, few are signalling these in their job adverts. Recent analysis found that only 13% of teacher job adverts mentioned at least one workload reduction initiative.[10] Examples included a ban on work communication during the weekends, an increased amount of non-contact time, collaborative planning, reduced reporting requirements, early Friday finishes, and reduced marking.

Priorities for reducing teacher workload

72% of teachers in England do not think their workload is acceptable and workload is consistently one of the main reasons why teachers leave their schools and the profession.[11] As such, improving teacher workload needs to be a central focus for schools looking to improve teacher retention.

Teachers have identified the following as **top priorities** for reducing workload:[12]
- behaviour management and pastoral care (cited by 81% of teachers);
- feedback, marking, and assessment (81%);
- lesson planning and preparation (76%); and
- dealing with pupil safeguarding and welfare issues (74%).

Workload priorities vary across schools and teachers. For example, secondary school teachers are more likely to highlight total teaching time and behaviour management as key issues. Primary school teachers, on the other hand, more often point to lesson planning as a priority for workload reduction. Recent evidence suggests that across all schools, managing pupil behaviour has been one of the fastest-growing contributors to teacher workload since the pandemic.[13]

While many teachers would like to see their overall workloads reduced, they are often reluctant to cut back on the parts of their role that they see as most impactful, such as lesson planning and communicating with families. In particular, lesson planning is often viewed by teachers as both a key driver of workload **and** central to their professional identity as a teacher.[14] This perhaps suggests that teachers may not want to spend less time on planning per se but instead may feel frustrated when there isn't enough time to do it well. To protect teacher autonomy and motivation, efforts should focus not just on cutting tasks but on making space for high-value tasks. This includes removing the structural barriers that make these tasks hard to manage.

Identifying the aspects of workload teachers most want prioritised within your specific school can help guide ongoing planning. The four areas in focus here—behaviour management, marking and assessment, lesson planning and preparation, and safeguarding and welfare—are likely to be important for all schools.

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[10] The EEF's Review of Recruitment and Retention in Disadvantaged Schools (Chong et al., 2024).
[11] Adams et al., 2023; Lynch et al., 2016; DfE, 2017; McLean et al., 2025.
[12] Survey data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[13] McLean and Worth, 2025.
[14] Interview data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).

Workload in disadvantaged schools

Understanding the specific workload pressures faced by disadvantaged schools is vital—teacher turnover is higher in these schools. [15]

Teachers and leaders in schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged pupils are more likely to say that behaviour management and pastoral care are the most challenging parts of their work—and the areas where improvement would have the biggest impact on retention. This reflects wider trends suggesting that the pandemic and cost of living crisis have placed greater workloads on schools serving disadvantaged communities, further increasing teacher workload. [16] As one teacher put it:

> *'I am finding now I'm having to be a lot more than the 'teacher'. I'm doing a lot of signposting parents to places where they can get support. [Parents] ask me questions, which is often things like 'I can't get a school uniform'... I'm having to respond to that message and then signpost them to the person with the [uniform] bank [in our school]. Which is a very small thing but when that then adds up, that's becoming quite big ... There's an aspect of 'it's not our job to be signposting' and [the school] telling us that we don't need to do that. But as a human being who's in a caring profession, it's very hard to say no.' [17]*

Teachers report that tasks relating to behaviour management and pastoral care—especially those involving managing conflict or supporting pupils and families facing challenging circumstances—can carry a high **emotional** workload. The emotionally taxing nature of these responsibilities can contribute to workloads feeling unmanageable. For senior leaders looking to make changes to their school's behaviour policies, the EEF's guidance report on Improving Behaviour in Schools provides actionable recommendations based on the best available evidence.

Teachers and leaders in disadvantaged schools also report facing more challenges with parental engagement and the additional support needed for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), English as an additional language (EAL), or low prior attainment. [18]

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[15] Cardim-Dias et al., 2025.
[16] Lucas et al., 2023; See, 2024.
[17] Primary teacher in school with high rates of eligibility for FSM, interviewed for the EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[18] Interview data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).

**Using technology to reduce teacher workload:
the impact of ChatGPT on lesson preparation time**

Many schools in England are considering how tools like generative artificial intelligence (AI) such as ChatGPT could reduce teacher workload. A recent EEF trial explored this by measuring the impact of using ChatGPT to support lesson and resource preparation; 259 science teachers from 68 secondary schools took part. Half of the teachers used ChatGPT to support their preparation for Year 7 and Year 8 science lessons; the other half did not use any AI tools. The findings were revealing:

- teachers using ChatGPT spent 25 minutes less per week on lesson planning—a **31% reduction**—compared to those who didn't use AI, on average;
- this time save was achieved with **relatively modest use**: teachers used ChatGPT to plan approximately a third of their lessons, typically using it to plan one activity or aspect of a lesson rather than the whole lesson; uses included tailoring lessons or materials to classes' needs, refreshing teaching ideas, creating questions and quizzes, and generating ideas for activities; and
- the **quality of lesson resources was similar** across both groups, and three-quarters of teachers were positive about using ChatGPT for lesson preparation; for some, the saved time reduced their workload while others used the time saved for marking or administrative tasks.

Does reducing workload support teacher retention?

Reducing workload could be one of the most promising ways to boost teacher retention. While there's limited evidence demonstrating that cutting workload directly improves retention in England, teachers consistently report it as a key factor in their decision to stay or leave. Given the many factors that contribute to workload, a multi-pronged approach is needed. Surveys show that teachers in schools with more workload strategies in place are more likely to feel that their workload is manageable.[19] A joined-up approach to workload can make a real difference.

When changes are made to try to improve workloads it can take time for the benefits to materialise. Most teachers who report that their school policies related to workload changed in the previous year feel that these changes have not actually improved their workloads. For example, those whose schools had changed their lesson planning and marking policies in the previous year reported that the changes had **added** to their workload (42%) and 29% felt it had made no difference. Only 28% felt the changes had reduced it.[20]

It is evident that policy changes may not immediately reduce workload. In contrast, they often increase it in the short term as staff adapt to new ways of working. School leaders should therefore monitor both short- and long-term impacts of policy changes and carefully consider the timing of new initiatives. Providing extra time, support, and clearly communicating the purpose and benefits of the change can help secure staff buy-in.

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[19] Survey data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[20] *Ibid*.

As a primary school leader interviewed as part of research into this issue put it:

'Your staff need to trust that you're doing something in the first place that will save them time in the long run.'[21]

Enablers and challenges in implementing workload reduction strategies

Efforts to reduce teacher workload face both system-wide and school-level challenges. Insufficient funding or staff capacity is reported as a barrier by 76% of teachers and leaders.[22] Other commonly reported barriers include accountability pressures. For example, workload associated with Ofsted inspections, and limited access to specialist support for pupils with additional needs, such as SEND. These factors are often beyond the control of individual schools highlighting that reducing workload may be difficult for school leaders without wider system support.

That said, teachers and leaders also identify barriers that are within the remit of individual schools. More than a quarter of teachers (28%) say they don't feel supported by their leadership team in efforts to reduce workload, with secondary school teachers particularly likely to raise this.[23] Many also feel that a lack of support from pupils' families, and concerns about the impact of workload reduction on pupils' education, can make progress towards a manageable workload more difficult.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 85% of teachers report that increases to funding or staffing would help.[24] Most also feel that access to a central source of high-quality curriculum materials and more effective support from outside agencies for pupils with specific needs would make a positive difference.

Crucially, manageable workloads may also be a foundation for the success of other teacher retention strategies. For instance, while flexible working offers have the potential to improve retention, workload issues can make these difficult to implement. Similarly, flexible working practices could also make workload pressure worse if not carefully managed. For example, teachers switching to working part-time may experience heightened workload pressures if their responsibilities aren't reduced proportionately. Workload management, including defining manageable and proportionate responsibilities, should be a central consideration when introducing any new retention strategy.

3. Flexible working

What is flexible working and how common is it in schools?

Flexible working describes arrangements that allow employees to vary the amount, timing, or location of their work. Following the introduction of the Flexible Working Regulations in 2014, all employees have the right to request flexible working. The table below shows examples of flexible working practices found in schools.

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[21] School leader interviewed for the EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[22] Survey data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*

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Examples of flexible working practices

Part-time working	Working less than full-time hours.
Job share	Two or more people doing one job and splitting the hours.
Phased retirement	Gradually reducing working hours or responsibilities to transition from full-time work to full-time retirement.
Staggered hours	Different start, finish, and break times.
Compressed hours	Working full-time hours but over fewer days.
Personal or family days	Days of authorised leave during term-time to which all employees in a school are entitled.
Lieu time	Paid time off work in lieu of having worked additional hours.
Home or remote working	The employee carries out work off-site. For teachers, this tends to take the form of completing planning, preparation, and assessment (PPA) time or professional development off-site.

Flexible working in schools most often takes the form of part-time working. National data shows that around one in five teachers work part-time, although this figure is slightly lower in schools with high numbers of pupils eligible for free school meals.[25] Other forms of flexible working are less common, especially when compared to the wider workforce where half of all graduates now work remotely.[26]

That said, there are some signs that flexible working is slowly becoming more common. Between 2022 and 2023, 17% of teachers reported changes to their school's flexible working practices.[27] Over that time:[28]

- the proportion of teachers able to do PPA at home rose from 12% to 15%;
- the proportion of teachers working staggered hours doubled from 7% to 14%; and
- the proportion of teachers offered ad-hoc personal days also doubled from 6% to 12%.

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[25] Sources include nationwide surveys such as the School Workforce Census and the Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders survey. See Harland et al. (2023) for more details.
[26] McLean et al., 2024.
[27] Survey data from EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[28] Department for Education, 2024.

Flexible working opportunities is also often mentioned in job adverts: 15% to 27% of teacher job adverts now include examples such as family friendly policies or 'flexi days'. [29]

Does offering flexible working support teacher retention?

Reviews have not found strong evidence—like results from randomised controlled trials (RCTs)—that link flexible working directly to teacher retention. However, the qualitative evidence is compelling: 82% of leaders at schools already offering it feel it has helped improve retention [30] and most teachers (76%) believe that being able to work flexibly would encourage them to stay in the profession long-term. [31]

Another problem with the research in this area is that evidence tends to group all types of flexible working together or focus mainly on part-time working. Because of this, we don't know yet which specific flexible working practices are most effective in boosting retention. More targeted research is needed.

Why might offering flexible working lead to improved retention?

Teachers most often seek flexible working arrangements to help them manage parental responsibilities and achieve a better work-life balance. However, the type of flexibility teachers want can vary depending on their career stage or personal circumstances.

Offering flexible working could support retention in several ways, including:

- improving wellbeing, work-life balance and job satisfaction;
- helping staff feel valued, trusted, and supported; and
- boosting productivity and motivation.

As one school leader put it:

> *'The wellbeing one is a bit of a no-brainer as people who are working in a way that suits them tend to be more productive and lots of schools were reporting that people were less stressed or less wrung out because they were able to work in ways that matched their lives'* [32]

Teachers often describe flexible working in terms of small-scale, situational accommodations, such as time off for personal commitments like attending a wedding or a child's sports day. These informal, ad-hoc arrangements are rarely captured in surveys or official data but many teachers say that these 'acts of goodwill' from school leaders can make a big difference to how they feel about their job. [33]

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[29] Our Flexible Working Review found that 51 out of a sample of 188 advertisements (27%) made at least one reference to flexible working (e.g. part-time, flexible working, work-life balance, job share, family friendly). However, our Review on Recruitment and Retention in Disadvantaged Schools found that 74 out of a sample of 500 advertisements (14.1%) mentioned flexible working initiatives or policies. The difference in these figures could be due to differences in inclusion criteria between the two reviews.
[30] IFF Research, 2023.
[31] CooperGibson Research, 2019a, 2020.
[32] School leader interviewed for the EEF's Flexible Working Review (Harland et al., 2023).
[33] Interview data from Harland et al., 2023.

'SLT, particularly the Headteacher, reinforce family time. If it's your child's sports day or it's your child's Christmas concert or graduation. It doesn't necessarily fall into the box of your days that you're allowed... [but] 95% of the time it's granted. Or you can accrue some extra hours to get that time off to do that. I think that's a really positive strategy for management, and that helps people to feel valued and then you've got more commitment to the school.' [34]

Could offering flexible working have negative impacts?

There is no strong research evidence suggesting that giving teachers the option to work flexibly has a negative impact, [35] however, some leaders and teachers express concerns in three areas.

- **Cost and staffing**. Some leaders worry that offering flexible working while maintaining a full five-day timetable requires hiring additional teachers, which could make recruitment challenges worse and increase costs. While these costs are difficult to measure, many leaders already implementing flexible working in their schools believe that the benefits of offering flexible working outweigh the costs. One economic analysis estimates that the costs could be offset by reduced staff absence and turnover within three years. [36]

- **Consistency for pupils**. Some leaders are concerned that part-time roles or job shares could affect teacher continuity, negatively impacting the learning experience for pupils, particularly younger pupils or those with special educational needs. Conversely, others point out flexible working may actually benefit pupils indirectly through increased teacher wellbeing and productivity and a more stable workforce.

- **Career progression**. Some teachers feel, to varying extents, that working flexibly (in particular, part-time working) may harm their future career prospects. The perception that leadership requires full-time availability can also discourage some teachers from progression.

When planning to roll out flexible working arrangements, leaders should think carefully about how to mitigate challenges around cost, consistency, and career progression. This could include encouraging buy-in from all staff and creating opportunities to listen to teachers' views and respond to their concerns.

Implementing flexible working practices: considerations for leaders

Research that includes case studies of schools doing flexible working well suggests some key factors can help make it work effectively. [37]

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[34] Primary teacher interviewed for the EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).
[35] Martin et al., 2023.
[36] Timewise, 2022.
[37] Harland et al., 2023.

- **Demonstrating supportive leadership and culture**. A clear commitment from school leaders can help foster more positive attitudes and create a more supportive climate around flexible working. This might include actively championing it and leading by example. When staff see flexible approaches are valued and supported from the top they are more likely to feel confident exploring them.

- **Adopting a whole-school, proactive approach**. Taking a proactive stance can help normalise a flexible working culture. School leaders might consider annually asking staff about their flexible working preferences instead of waiting for individual requests. Many schools have a flexible working policy but studies have found that teachers are often unaware of their options. Having a clear and accessible flexible working policy also helps create a fair and transparent approval process.

- **Showing willingness to compromise**. Effective flexible working is a two-way process. Teachers and leaders should work together to find practical solutions that meet both individual and school needs.

- **Timetabling with flexibility in mind**. Effective and flexible scheduling can help make different working patterns viable. For example, enabling support staff to join meetings or professional development remotely or adjusting duties such as form time or assemblies later in the day to allow for varied start times.

- **Clearly defining responsibilities**. Success with flexible working can hinge on clear expectations and responsibilities. This can include setting clear expectations around attendance—for example at staff meetings or PD—and introducing effective systems for keeping in touch and sharing updates.

Some evidence suggests that teachers and leaders in disadvantaged schools feel less positive about flexible working, often due to existing workload pressures that complicate implementation and buy-in. These schools may benefit from additional planning and support to help flexible working arrangements succeed.

4.   School leadership, culture, and climate

School leaders play an essential role in shaping their school's culture and climate. These terms cover things like the relationships and interactions between staff, shared goals and values, and how schools are organised and run.

Most of the research in this area looks at links between the measurable aspects of leadership, culture, and climate and teacher outcomes such as job satisfaction or retention. However, we don't yet have strong evidence to show whether improving aspects of school leadership directly improves retention, or how to implement these changes well. Despite this, several aspects of leadership practice and school culture show promise for teacher retention. [38]

Fostering a supportive working environment

Valuing and appreciating teacher contributions

A school culture in which staff feel genuinely valued and appreciated helps maintain teachers' motivation and morale. Leaders can play a key part in this by recognising teachers' efforts and contributions, expressing authentic appreciation, while also ensuring that any reward systems are fair and transparent.

A positive behavioural climate

Teachers seem more likely to stay teaching in schools where the environment is calm, respectful, and collaborative. It helps, for example, when leaders actively support and back their teachers in managing challenging pupil behaviour, that they apply school rules consistently, and collaborate with teachers to solve disciplinary issues. This kind of leadership can be especially important for retaining teachers in schools serving high proportions of disadvantaged pupils.

Fairness and transparency

Fair distribution of workload, PD opportunities, and effective support systems and resources for teachers help maintain job satisfaction. Clear communication and transparent decision-making processes strengthen relationships between staff and leaders; inconsistent messaging or misaligned expectations, in contrast, can undermine trust and morale.

> *'We've had some changes in leadership and sometimes it feels like everybody has got their own agenda ... They don't understand that they're all wanting a part of us. Sometimes there's not joined up thinking.'* [39]

Collegiality and relational trust

Positive and trusting relationships between staff are linked to higher teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout. When teachers don't feel trusted or respected by leadership it

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[38] These areas represent findings synthesised from across all five EEF reviews but in particular the 'Leadership, Culture and Climate Review' (Nguyen et al., 2023).
[39] Secondary teacher interviewed for the EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).

can hinder both retention and the success of other retention initiatives such as flexible working arrangements.

Prioritising teacher development

Supporting professional growth

Leaders should provide meaningful opportunities for PD and remove barriers such as time or logistical constraints that can prevent full participation. These opportunities can include external courses or further study, but also in-school support. Cultivating leadership potential in teachers can also support job satisfaction. The EEF's guidance report on Effective Professional Development provides evidence-based recommendations to help schools select high quality external PD and design effective in-house PD.

Creating a climate of intellectual stimulation

Actively encouraging and nurturing innovation, collaborative learning, and professional engagement can all support teachers' job satisfaction and subsequently retention. This includes practices that foster collaboration between teaching colleagues through in-school learning communities or networks between schools.

Promoting teacher autonomy and agency

Professional autonomy

Granting teachers the necessary professional freedom to manage their workload and day-to-day tasks links closely to job satisfaction. Supporting autonomy empowers teachers by giving them a sense of control over their professional lives. This not only helps them to manage their workload more efficiently but also contributes to improved overall wellbeing. However, autonomy should go hand-in-hand with the right level of support. For example, early career teachers may still benefit from having flexibility in their approach but might still need support with managing workload or prioritising tasks.

> *'Our school is good at taking the teachers' professional judgements and listening to them and recognising that that person wouldn't be asking for that time if they didn't need it.'* [40]

Teacher voice

Providing meaningful opportunities for teachers to participate in decision-making (for example, for new policies) can strengthen their sense of belonging and commitment to the school. However, simply involving staff in decisions does not always support wellbeing, particularly if it adds to workload or feels tokenistic. It is important for leaders to create safe, structured spaces for teachers to express their views and concerns and to demonstrate that these perspectives are genuinely listened to and acted on. Leaders who do this well are more likely to be seen by teachers as responsible, supportive, and attentive to staff needs.

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[40] Primary teacher interviewed for the EEF's Workload Review (Martin et al., 2023).

*'Because [changes are] done in consultation with us, it makes you feel valued.
It makes you feel that actually SLT are listening to us. They want to hear our
views as well which is always quite good.'* [41]

5. Financial incentives and other benefits

Financial incentives

Of the various strategies used to attract teachers to schools, financial incentives (such as higher pay, recruitment bonuses, or loan forgiveness schemes) have the strongest evidence of effectiveness. [42] While more research is needed to determine the impact of other strategies on recruitment (such as those described in this summary), financial incentives remain one of the most promising approaches for school leaders or policymakers aiming to attract more applicants to teaching roles. Of course, competing priorities and budget constraints faced by the education sector often limit schools' ability to act in this area.

Importantly, while financial incentives can support teacher *recruitment* they do not always support *retention*, particularly where incentives are provided up-front without a commitment for teachers to stay in role after receiving the incentive. [43] Incentives paid over time or linked to commitments to stay in the profession may be more effective over the longer term. [44] In some cases, financial incentives may need to be combined with broader improvements to working conditions in order to be as impactful on retention as they are on recruitment.

Recruitment to disadvantaged schools

Financial incentives show particular promise for schools serving disadvantaged communities and in attracting teachers to hard-to-staff areas.

- A review of the evidence on attracting teachers to 'hard-to-staff' schools found that financial incentives are currently the only approach with good evidence of impact. [45]
- Estimates from a recent experiment suggest that teachers may need to be offered a salary around 10% higher to consider applying to a school with a higher proportion of children eligible for FSM than their current school. [46]

[41] *Ibid.*
[42] Rapid evidence assessment from the EEF's Scoping Review on Teacher Quality, Recruitment, and Retention (Taylor et al., 2023).
[43] Systematic review from See et al., 2020.
[44] Sims and Benhenda, 2022; See et al., 2020; Worth and McLean, 2025.
[45] Systematic review from See et al., 2020.

[46] The EEF's Teacher Recruitment Strategies Experimental Study (Allen et al., 2025).

Workplace benefits and job attributes

Amid recruitment and retention challenges, many school leaders are keen to understand which workplace benefits and job attributes are valued most by teachers. Research into teacher responses to job adverts suggests teachers place the highest value on clearly defined and tangible commitments—such as a specified increase in protected PPA time, smaller class sizes, or time off to attend appointments.[47] In contrast, vaguer statements about promoting wellbeing or a positive school culture tend to have less influence on application decisions.

Despite this, 'soft' commitments appear frequently in teacher job adverts.[48] For example, 78% of adverts reference a supportive school community, with mentions of friendly and welcoming colleagues or transparent leadership practices. Most adverts also include statements about staff welfare (58%). While these may make a small difference and cost little for schools to include, they are less likely to influence teacher application decisions than more concrete benefits. One possible explanation is that job attributes like a 'positive school culture', while important to teachers, are difficult to credibly signal via job adverts alone.

The most attractive workplace benefits are often costly. In many cases, using funds to increase salaries may be more effective for recruitment than offering benefits with equivalent financial value.[49] However, some job benefits or attributes may offer better value for money. For example, tentative evidence suggests that providing free healthcare services (which may include free dentistry, physiotherapy , counselling, or time off for appointments), childcare subsidies, and flexible working options may be more attractive to applicants than equivalent pay rises.[50] More research is needed to fully understand how such benefits influence recruitment and retention. For now, financial incentives remain the best evidenced approach.

The cost of recruiting teachers

Teachers are often reluctant to move to a new school without a significant pay rise.[51] This is understandable given the challenges associated with changing roles—adjusting to new systems and ways of working, building new relationships, potential relocation costs, and the uncertainly that comes with any new role. As a result, attracting new teachers can be both difficult and expensive. This

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[47] *Ibid.*
[48] The EEF's Review of Recruitment and Retention in Disadvantaged Schools (Chong et al., 2024).
[49] The EEF's Teacher Recruitment Strategies Experimental Study (Allen et al., 2025).
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*

underlines the importance of retaining teachers. Focusing on developing a positive school culture and good working conditions is not only central to retention but may also help to support recruitment over time by building a strong reputation as a good place to work.

6. Implementation of strategies to support teacher recruitment and retention

It is unlikely that there is a single 'silver bullet' for solving the teacher recruitment and retention challenge. Multiple factors drive these issues, meaning that schools need to take multiple actions, each contributing incrementally to improvements. As well as the choice of actions, how well schools implement these strategies is likely key to their effectiveness.

Our guidance report, A School's Guide to Implementation, offers three evidence-informed recommendations on how schools can effectively implement new strategies, approaches, or interventions. Applying these principles may help leaders effectively manage and improve plans to support teacher recruitment and retention.

1. Adopt the behaviours that drive implementation

Key behaviours that have been evidenced to support effective implementation include **engaging** people so that they can shape what happens, **uniting** people around what is being implemented, and **reflecting**, **monitoring**, and **adapting** to improve implementation. Actively involving staff in conversations about how retention could be supported and uniting staff around a shared goal to support retention—with demonstrable leadership support for this—is likely to be crucial for kickstarting the effective implementation of a teacher retention plan.

2. Attend to the contextual factors that influence implementation

As well as considering whether an initiative is feasible and appropriate for the setting, leaders should consider how existing systems and structures can support implementation and how individuals driving change can be supported to contribute effectively. The approaches covered by each section of this summary touch on a range of enablers, challenges, and contextual factors that may influence recruitment and retention efforts. Taking these into account—and exploring what the specific barriers and enablers might be in your own school—can help to lay the groundwork for successful implementation.

3. Use a structured but flexible implementation process

Sustaining engagement over time through a structured and consultative implementation process is often key to effective implementation. This may be particularly true in the case of teacher recruitment and retention initiatives since their effects can take time to materialise and the dynamic nature of schools can mean that plans need to evolve as new demands emerge. With this in mind, it can be helpful to treat implementation as a process of ongoing learning and improvement.

For more information on effective implementation, please read the full guidance report and supporting resources on our website.

7.   Conclusion and future research

There is a lot of research documenting the pressures that lead to workforce challenges. However, we know less about which strategies actually work best in practice, or how to implement these well.

Most of the current evidence base focuses on what teachers and leaders say they **think** would help or looks at correlations rather than impact. This is because doing robust research on recruitment and retention is difficult: it takes a long time, needs lots of schools to take part, and involves factors that are hard to define and measure like school climate, effective leadership, and professional autonomy. As a result, the evidence base is growing slowly.

So far, offering financial incentives is the only approach with strong evidence. However, there are other promising areas that school leaders can focus on, including:

1. **Reducing workload** in ways that are most meaningful to teachers;
2. Improving access to teacher **flexible working**;
3. Creating a **positive school culture** where staff feel valued and supported; and
4. Making **job adverts** clearer about the **tangible benefits** the school can offer.

To help build the evidence base, the EEF is funding new research including studies exploring the impact of flexible working approaches[52] and a funding round on leadership approaches to support recruitment and retention. We hope this summary, and its accompanying reflection tool, will help school leaders think about what changes might be possible in their own schools to help attract and keep great teachers.

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[52] Evaluating a Nine-Day Working Fortnight as a Strategy to Improve Teacher Retention (EEF, forthcoming). Exploring the Impact of Offsite Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) on Teacher Retention (EEF, forthcoming).

Appendix: The EEF projects this summary is based on

Teacher Quality, Recruitment, and Retention: Rapid Evidence Assessment (2023)

Authors: Becky Taylor, Mark Hardman, Sal Riordan, Claire Pillinger, and Gemma Moss.
Overarching research questions: What proxies of teacher quality exist in the literature? What are the main approaches that could be used to improve recruitment, retention, and distribution of high quality teachers in disadvantaged schools?
Method: Rapid evidence assessments for teacher quality (54 studies) and recruitment and retention (55 studies).
Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention

Understanding the Factors that Support the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers—Review of Flexible Working Approaches (2023)

Authors: Jennie Harland, Eleanor Bradley, and Jack Worth.
Overarching research question: Do flexible working approaches support teacher recruitment and retention?
Method: Mixed methods review, comprising:
- rapid evidence assessment—47 items (27 research articles, 20 pieces of guidance and practice examples) published between 2019 and April 2023;
- analysis of 2022 School Workforce Census data;
- analysis of teaching job adverts and flexible working policies for 500 English schools; and
- case study interviews with eight flexible working support leads.

Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/flexible-working-approaches

Supporting the Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Schools with High Proportions of Disadvantaged Pupils: Understanding Current Practice Around Managing Teacher Workload (2023)

Authors: Kerry Martin, Rachel Classick, Caroline Sharp, and Henry Faulkner-Ellis
Overarching research question: What practices and strategies exist to manage teacher workload in English schools?
Method: Practice review, comprising:
- rapid desk review (30 sources);
- online survey of 1,326 teachers and leaders from 1,137 schools; and
- semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers and leaders.

Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/workload-review

Reviewing the Evidence Base on School Leadership, Culture, Climate, and Structure for Teacher Retention (2023)

Authors: Dong Nguyen, Beng Huat See, Chris Brown, and Dimitra Kokotsaki.
Overarching research question: What characteristics of school leadership, culture, climate, and structure support teacher retention?
Method: Rapid evidence assessment of 89 research articles published between 2000 and May 2023.
Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/leadership-approaches

Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Schools in Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Areas in England—Review of Practice (2024)

Authors: Sin Wang Chong, Emily Oxley, Violeta Negrea, Melissa Bond, Qi Lui, and Ming Sum Kong.
Overarching research questions: What are the teacher recruitment and retention strategies used in schools in England in socioeconomically challenging areas? What is the perceived importance of those strategies?
Method: Practice review, comprising:
- analysis of 526 teaching job adverts in schools in schools in Education Investment Areas (EIAs);
- online survey with 62 teachers and school leaders in EIAs;
- production of a typology of teacher recruitment and retention strategies

Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/evidence-reviews/recruitment-and-retention-in-disadvantaged-schools

Evaluating Teacher Recruitment Strategies Using Fully Randomised Paired Conjoint Experiments—Evaluation Report (2025)

Authors: Rebecca Allen, Iain Ford, John Jerrim, Loic Menzies, Sam Sims, and Burak Sonmez.
Overarching research questions: Which working conditions or benefits do teachers find most attractive in job advertisements? What salary increases or job benefits are necessary to encourage teachers to accept positions in schools with a higher proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals?
Method: Large-scale paired conjoint experiments and surveys including approximately 6
,000 teachers across England.
Available here: https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/school-choices-evaluating-teacher-recruitment-strategies

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Worth, J. and McLean, D. (2025) 'The Impact of Early Career Retention Payments on Teacher Retention' NFER. https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/the-impac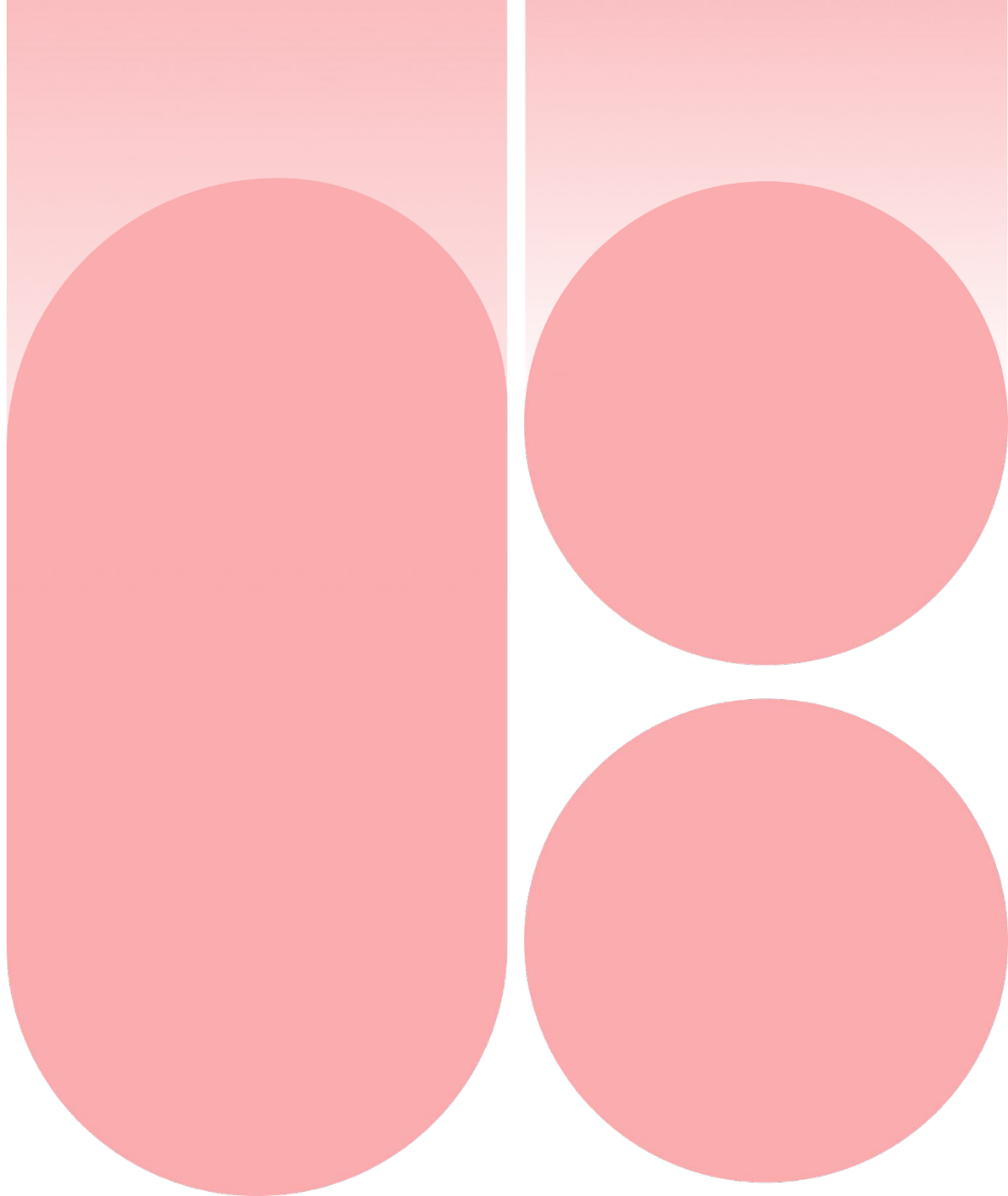t-of-early-career-retention-payments-on-teacher-retention/