



## ***NEU SUPPLY TEACHER SURVEY REPORT 2019***

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The NEU's annual supply teacher survey examines a range of issues relating to supply teachers and their pay and employment. The evidence provided from more than 1450 respondents (a significant increase on last year's total) enables us to form a reliable picture of the continuing problems facing teachers in this sector.

This report looks at:

- how and why teachers take up the role, how they get their supply teaching work and whether they wish to return to regular employment in schools;
- agency supply teachers' views on pay, pensions and working for agencies;
- all supply teachers' views about the experience of working as a supply teacher; and
- the composition of the supply teacher workforce compared to the overall teacher workforce in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, experience, etc.

### **WORKING AS A SUPPLY TEACHER – WHY AND HOW**

#### **Reasons for deciding to work as a supply teacher**

Previous NEU/NUT surveys have suggested that most supply teachers enter supply teaching in pursuit of a work pattern fitting with their personal circumstances, with lower proportions moving from regular teaching for health or other reasons, undertaking some teaching in their retirement, or having not yet been able to obtain a permanent teaching post.

However, as in 2018, the biggest single reason for moving to supply teaching appears to be the workload in permanent teaching posts. This proved to be by some margin the single most widespread reason cited by this year's respondents for entering supply teaching, with 31% identifying this as the main factor in their decision.

Other significant reasons for switching to supply teaching continued to be "it fits in with my family/home life circumstances" (17%) and "I cannot find a permanent teaching post" (13%).

Many respondents continued in their comments to cite their disillusionment with the long hours and excessive paperwork and the testing and target-driven culture involved in permanent teaching work. Others cited work-related ill-health and stress as factors or said they had left permanent posts due to management bullying or redundancy.

Many who chose the "other reasons" option (9%) nevertheless again focused on the perceived negative aspects of holding a permanent teaching post as having been the primary reason for moving into supply teaching. Some said that losing out to younger and cheaper teachers when applying for permanent posts had left them with little option but to work as a supply teacher.

## Getting work as a supply teacher

The proportion of supply teachers who principally or mainly obtain their work through agencies continues to rise. In 2019, 82% of respondents now mainly work via agencies. This is up one per cent from the 81% figure in the 2018 survey, which was itself significantly higher than in 2017 (76%), 2014 (67%) and 2010 (50%). The proportion of supply teachers who mainly source their supply work through a local authority “supply pool” was 3%, down from 4% in 2018. This has fallen significantly since the 2014 (8%) and 2010 (11%) surveys. Only 13% now say they secure most or all of their supply teaching work directly with schools, down from 15% in 2018, 25% in 2014 and 39% in 2010.

## Desire for permanent employment

Although only 13% of respondents said they had decided to enter supply teaching because they could not find a permanent post, a much higher proportion (38%) said they would take up a permanent post if offered one. Supply teaching remains, for many, a career choice which is difficult later on to reverse in favour of regular employment.

## AGENCY SUPPLY TEACHING

### Agencies – which are the biggest?

Respondents to this year's survey again referred to working via almost 200 different supply teacher agencies. The following were the twelve largest agencies in terms of teachers employed or placed - which accounted for 43% of the agency supply teachers responding.

- Teaching Personnel 8%
- New Directions 5%
- Vision Education 5%
- Hays Education 5%
- Protocol Education 4%
- Supply Desk 3%
- Randstad Education 3%
- Monarch 2%
- Simply Education 2%
- Reed 2%
- Capita 2%
- Tradewind 2%

The twelve agencies listed here are almost identical to those listed in previous surveys. Teaching Personnel occupied the top spot in 2014 and has remained there every year since.

## Rates of pay

Respondents were asked to specify their current standard daily rate of pay from their agency (banded as £100 or less, £100-124, £125-149 and £150 or more).

Despite nationally worsening problems of teacher supply, this year's survey does not suggest that this is putting any upward pressure on pay for agency supply teachers. In fact, if anything, pay is falling. The percentage saying they are paid £150 or more per day remained at almost 9% as in 2018, whereas the percentage paid between £125 and £149 fell from 30% to 26%. This year the percentage paid £100-£124 fell from 41% to 40%, while the percentage paid less than £100 increased from 11% to 14%. Finally, 10% could not choose one single option due to their pay rate varying between placements – up slightly from 8%.

These figures demonstrate yet again that the pay offered to experienced teachers by supply agencies is unacceptably low. A daily rate of £100 means that, even if the teacher works every day of the school year, they earn around £4,000 less than a newly qualified teacher in a full-time post. Even a daily rate of £150 pays an experienced supply teacher at best some 10% less than a teacher with 5 years' experience paid at the Main Pay Range maximum.

Regional pay variations continue to be substantial. Agency teachers in Greater London were better paid, with 21% paid £150 or more compared to 9% nationally, and 52% paid £125 to £149 compared to 26% nationally. The worst paid areas were, once again, Wales and the South West, with 85% and 91% of respondents respectively being paid less than £125 per day. Indeed nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents from Wales received a daily rate of less than £100. The increased response this year from Wales accounts for much of the change overall in the pay distribution outlined above.

When comparing their situation to three years ago, 31% of respondents (excluding "don't knows" and newer supply teachers) say they were paid less, or significantly less, than then.

When asked how their pay compared to the pay rate for the pay scale point on which they were most recently employed by a school or local authority, the vast majority (89%) said that their pay rate as a supply teacher was lower or significantly lower.

Low pay and low incomes from supply teaching had compelled more than half (56%) of all survey respondents to take on other work, whilst 17% said that they had claimed benefits and 2% said that they had used food banks. Individual responses showed that many supply teachers are reliant on savings or major cutbacks in household expenditure in order to remain solvent, while others said they had accumulated significant debts. Other responses suggested that a number had taken or were contemplating taking their Teachers' Pension early in order to access extra income, despite the reduction in pension benefits that this would entail.

## Agencies and pensions

Supply agencies cannot offer membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) but are covered by the "workplace pension" requirements which have been phased in since 2012. This year, 66% of agency teachers (up from 64% in 2018) said that they can now build up pension provision through their agency work but with employer contributions continuing to remain generally at the statutory minimum. If 'don't knows' are excluded, this figure rises to 83%, but this still leaves 17% who said they have not been offered a workplace pension – despite the law requiring all agencies to do so.

## **Umbrella companies and Limited companies**

This year, 25% of those surveyed said that they were paid through an umbrella company or offshore payroll company, rather than being employed by the agency. This figure continues to decline from a high of 47% in 2015, falling to 42% in 2016 and 30% last year. This downward trend may indicate a decline in teachers' willingness to enter umbrella company arrangements, which the NEU has advised members are not a requirement when working via agencies.

This year, only 18% said that that their agency insisted on teachers working through umbrella companies or limited company arrangements, compared with 23% in 2018 and 62% in 2017. Moreover, in 2019 respondents reported that 59% of agencies allowed respondents to be paid via PAYE as an alternative to umbrella arrangements.

As in 2018, this year's survey again asked about "limited company" arrangements, given the NEU's significant reservations about the legal and tax position of supply teachers in relation to "self-employment" arrangements. As last year, only some 4% of respondents said they work through limited company arrangements.

More than two-thirds of those surveyed (68%) expressed the view that umbrella company and limited company providers were not entirely clear about their fees and services.

## **App-based "supply registers"**

As in 2018, the survey asked respondents whether they had obtained work via any of the recently-established privately run, app-based supply register operators, and if so, to comment on their experience of this new model.

Only a handful of respondents had experience of this type of scheme. Operators cited included AirSupply, TeacherIn and Just Education, although others were also mentioned. The fact that so few teachers had experience of these operators suggests that their impact has, so far, been less than expected.

## **Derogation / permanent / "pay between assignments" contracts**

As in last year's survey, only 5% said that they had been asked to sign a contract of this kind, which creates an ongoing employment relationship with the agency but also removes the right under the Agency Worker Regulations to equal pay after 12 weeks. This again suggests that such contracts are less common than is sometimes suggested.

Of those who did work in this way, only 2% had received any communication from their agency as to how it proposed to change their guaranteed work contract from 6 April 2020 to meet new legal requirements.

## **Cover supervisor work**

This year's survey found that while a majority (57%) of respondents had never been offered cover supervisor work - involving classroom supervision, but not (supposedly) involving any actual teaching - by their agencies, 29% had occasionally been offered it and 13% had been offered it regularly. Of those who had occasionally or regularly been offered it in the past year, nearly half (48%) said this had happened more frequently than in previous years, with 40% saying it had happened as frequently and 11% less frequently.

Twenty-one per cent of teachers said that they had accepted work as a "cover supervisor" which had in practice required actual teaching. This shows a continuing worrying tendency by some schools to seek to secure supply teachers on even lower rates than those paid for supply teaching. With cover supervisors more common in secondary than primary schools, 35% of secondary respondents reported this happening to them compared to only 12% of primary respondents.

## **Satisfaction with agencies – the advantages and disadvantages**

The survey asked those working for agencies about the advantages and disadvantages of seeking supply teaching work in this way.

As in previous years, the main perceived advantages were access to more regular teaching work and a greater choice of such work than could be obtained through other routes. The disadvantages included low pay, pay not reflecting experience, lack of training, assignments cancelled at the last minute, lack of entitlement to pensions, and "finders' fees" placing an obstacle to being offered a job at a school after a successful placement.

## **EXPERIENCE WITH SCHOOLS**

We again asked supply teachers about their experience with schools and the support they receive on and after arrival.

The majority of agency supply teachers again told us they were satisfied with support from schools, with 62% "usually" satisfied (the same as in 2018) and a further 6% "always" satisfied (up from 2% in 2018). This still means, however, that almost a third (32%) are "rarely" or "never" satisfied (the same proportion as in 2018). Among those working directly with schools or via LA pools, 87% are "usually" or "always" satisfied.

The problems reported were similar to previous years, including lack of information about individual pupils (cited by 76% of agency teachers and 66% of others); lack of access to teaching resources (67% and 63%); lack of access to planned work (50% and 42%); and lack of a named manager/contact (52% and 50%).

In terms of teachers' perceptions of what schools expect of them, the survey presented a mixed picture. Over four-fifths (82%) said that schools were "usually reasonable" on expectations around break and other duties, but these percentages fell considerably in describing how "usually reasonable" schools were about report writing (60%) and data collection (59%).

Respondents were also asked to rate how welcome they were made to feel by staff, pupils and parents. There are notable differences between the results for agency supply teachers and those working directly with schools or via LA supply pools. For example, only 16% of agency teachers reported that they were always made to feel welcome by regular staff working in schools, compared with 53% of directly employed teachers and those employed via LA pools. Pupils and parents were also rated as significantly more welcoming by directly employed/LA supply pool teachers than agency teachers. This is perhaps unsurprising, as directly employed teachers in particular are more likely to know the schools and staff they work with than their agency counterparts.

## **CURRENT EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS**

### **Availability of supply teaching work**

Previous surveys of teachers and schools have suggested that supply teaching work is becoming increasingly scarce, due in large part to schools' increasing use of cover supervisors in place of qualified supply teachers. The survey asked teachers how often they could access work when they wanted it, and how this compared to the previous year. The decline in the availability of work is a further contributor to the low incomes on which many supply teachers have to exist.

### **Access to agency work**

Availability of supply teaching work via agencies remained at a similarly low level to the 2018 survey. Less than one third (29%) of agency teachers - down from just over half in 2016 - said that they could get work almost every day. Slightly more (41%) could only obtain work about half the time, while 17% sometimes could not obtain work for up to a week at a time. Twelve per cent said they were being offered no work for weeks at a time.

### **Access to direct employment**

This route to obtaining work now appears to be even more precarious for those who rely upon it for income. Only 15% of those who seek their supply teaching work in this way said they could get work almost every day, with less than a third (32%) able to get work half of the time. Twenty-two per cent said they could not get work for up to a week at a time, with a similar proportion reporting that they were unable to access work for weeks at a time. Eight per cent of respondents were very rarely able to obtain work at all.

### **Access to supply work by sector**

Only 24 per cent of primary respondents could obtain work almost every day, compared to 31% of secondary respondents, while 40% of primary and 39% of secondary respondents could get work around half of the time. Fewer secondary teachers (12% compared with 14%) were offered no work for weeks at a time.

### **Trends in access to work**

When asked to compare their situation to the previous year, 45% of agency supply teachers and 49% of those directly employed as supply teachers said that getting work was becoming increasingly hard – compared with 43% and 49% respectively last year.

## COMPOSITION OF THE SUPPLY TEACHER WORKFORCE

### Sector in which usually employed

Just over three fifths (63%) predominantly taught in primary schools, although the regular teaching workforce is split almost 50-50 between the two sectors. As noted above, problems over the availability of genuine supply teacher employment (as opposed to cover supervisor work) may be affecting supply teachers in the secondary sector more than the primary sector.

### Age

As in previous years, the survey suggests that the supply teacher workforce is considerably older than the teaching workforce generally. 69% of all respondents and 66% of agency teacher respondents were over 45, compared to only 20% of the total teaching workforce. Teachers aged 35 or under, on the other hand, made up only 13% of all respondents and 14% of agency teacher respondents, compared to 42% of the overall teacher workforce.

### Sex

The composition of the survey response - 77% female - suggests that the supply teacher workforce remains very similar in this respect to the whole teacher workforce. This year's survey again suggested little difference in the experiences of women and men in relation to the matters surveyed, other than that women were more likely to cite family/home life circumstances as their reason for working as a supply teacher.

### Ethnicity

The survey found that 84% of supply teachers were White / White British compared to 87.5% of the whole teaching workforce. Meanwhile, 3% were Black / Black British, compared with 2% of the whole workforce; and 5% were Asian / Asian British compared to 3.7% in the whole workforce. These figures are broadly unchanged from 2015.

BME supply teachers were more likely to be based in London and the West Midlands and more likely to work for agencies. They were also paid slightly more on average, although the proportion based in Greater London may help explain the pay differential.

### Sexual orientation

Taken together, 6% of respondents identified as bisexual, lesbian, gay or other. Teachers in these groups were more likely to obtain work via agencies (91% compared with 82% overall) and also more likely to have taken on other non-teaching work to supplement their income (67% compared with 57% overall).

### Disability

Four per cent of respondents defined themselves as disabled. They were more likely to work for agencies (91% compared with 82% of all respondents) and also more likely to be rarely or never satisfied with their experience with schools (52% compared to 32% overall).

### Experience in regular teaching employment

While more than 60% of supply teachers had over 10 years' experience in regular teaching, 26% of respondents had less than 5 years, of which 14% had less than 2 years.

### Experience in supply teaching

The survey reaffirmed that for many respondents, supply teaching has become long term employment – more than one in eight said they had worked as a supply teacher for more than ten years. However, two thirds said they had less than 5 years' experience in supply teaching, and more than a quarter had less than 2 years.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NEU'S WORK

Respondents were again asked to suggest what priorities the NEU should be following to improve conditions for its supply teacher members. The results are as follows:

Campaign for national register of supply teachers, paying in line with national pay rates	79%
Campaign for higher pay from supply agencies	69%
Campaign for national standards for supply agencies	49%
Promotion of NEU supply charter to schools	40%
Publication of more NEU guidance for supply teachers	35%

All of these are already NEU priorities and will continue to be actively pursued.

The supply teaching workforce is an important component of overall teacher supply. Most supply teachers continue to choose to work on this basis and - despite the well-known issues over pay and pensions - supply teaching continues to attract teachers who do not wish to continue, or feel they cannot continue, in a regular teaching post. As we have said previously, that sends a message about the need for action on workload and other pressures for teaching generally, both in order to retain those currently in regular employment and to attract supply teachers back into regular employment.

Many, however, become supply teachers because they cannot find a permanent teaching job and many more find it harder than they had imagined to return to regular teaching when they want to do so. Agency supply teachers continue to be poorly paid compared to other teachers and continue to be denied access to the Teachers' Pension Scheme, and agencies continue to cost schools money while acting as the main or only source of work for supply teachers. This 2019 survey report, therefore, once more demonstrates the continuing need for the NEU's campaign for fair play for supply teachers.