



NUT SUPPLY TEACHER SURVEY 2016

The NUT's annual supply teacher survey examines a range of issues relating to supply teachers and their pay and employment. This year's response from over 1000 members demonstrates the continuing problems facing teachers in this badly-treated sector.

This report looks at:

- how and why teachers take up the role and how they get their work;**
- how supply teachers and agency supply teachers compare to teachers generally in terms of age, gender, experience, etc;**
- agency supply teachers' experience on pay, pensions and working for agencies;**
- all supply teachers' views about working as a supply teacher and on returning to regular employment in schools.**

WORKING AS A SUPPLY TEACHER – HOW AND WHY

Main reason for working as a supply teacher

The largest single groups continue to be those teachers citing “lifestyle choice” reasons for supply teaching - to fit with family or personal circumstances or other work/study commitments - and those teachers who no longer want a permanent teaching job.

In total, 26% of respondents fell into the former category while a further 23% stated they no longer wished to work in a permanent post (or 33% if we include those who specified that they no longer wanted a permanent post for health reasons).

Many respondents cited disillusionment with long working hours, excessive paperwork and meetings and the testing- and target-driven culture facing permanent teachers as being the principal factors which had prompted their move to supply teaching.

This meant a further fall in the proportion of those working as supply teachers due to being unable to find permanent employment - this fell to 16%, from 21% in 2014 and over 25% in 2010.

Of the remainder, 13% said that they were retired (a figure which continues to decline and is unsurprisingly significantly smaller among agency supply teachers). Other reasons given included doing so while looking for an appropriate post, as opposed to being unable to find a post.

For those employed through agencies, no longer wishing to work in a permanent teaching post was the most prevalent reason for working as a supply teacher (25%), with “lifestyle choice” reasons cited by 21%. Inability to find a permanent post (the largest single category in 2015 at almost 30%) dropped to 19% in 2016. There were many fewer retired teachers among agency teachers, since retired teachers continue to be more likely to work directly with schools.

Although only 16% said they were teaching on a supply basis because they could not find a permanent post, a much higher proportion (36%) again said they would wish to take up a permanent post if offered one.

Getting work as a supply teacher

The proportion of supply teachers saying they mainly obtain work through agencies continues to rise. Agency work is the principal route for 77% of respondents, up from 67% in 2014 and from 50% in 2010. Less than 4% now mainly get work through a local authority "supply pool", compared to 8% in 2014 and 11% in 2010, while 17% get work directly with schools, down from 25% in 2014 and 39% in 2010.

AGENCY SUPPLY TEACHING

Agencies – which are the biggest?

Respondents to this year's survey referred to working via almost 200 different supply teacher agencies. The following were the ten largest agencies in terms of teachers employed or placed - which as in 2015 accounted for 40% of the agency supply teachers responding.

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

Rates of pay

The survey asked teachers whether their pay rate matches the rate they would get if employed directly by the school - which we refer to as the "national rate" - and, if not, what rate of pay they do receive.

"National rates" are currently as follows:

- Main Pay Range maximum - £168 nationally, rising to £194 in Inner London; and
- Upper Pay Range maximum - £194 nationally, rising to £238 in Inner London.

Less than 7% this year said that they were paid the same as the "national rate", although 21% did not know. As noted in last year's survey report, the concept of the "national rate" continues to be more familiar to older and longer standing supply teachers, with younger teachers less likely to understand it.

Respondents were then asked to specify their current standard daily rate of pay in bands ranging from below £100, £100-124, £125-149, to £150 and above.

Despite overall teacher shortages, this year's survey does not suggest any upward trend in the pay for agency supply teachers. As last year, only a tiny percentage (6%) were paid £150 or more per day, with 29% paid between £125 and £149 (up from 26% last year). 43% said they were paid £100-£124 (down from 45%) with 14% paid less than £100 (up from 12%). Since even a daily rate of £150 is some 10% below the "national rate" for a teacher with 5 years' experience, this demonstrates again the unacceptably low pay for supply teachers working through agencies.

This year, only 8% said that their pay rates varied between placements, and not simply according to whether the placement is daily or longer term.

Regional pay variations continue to be substantial. Agency teachers in Greater London are best paid, with 62% being paid £125 or more, compared to 35% nationally. The worst paid areas are Wales and the South West, with 95% and 84% respectively of respondents in these regions being paid less than £125 per day.

Comparisons with three years earlier show that almost one third of respondents (excluding "don't know" and newer supply teachers) are being paid less, or significantly less, than three years ago.

Agencies and pensions

Supply agencies cannot offer membership of the Teachers' Pension Scheme (TPS) but are covered by the "workplace pension" requirements being phased in since 2012. This year, 50% of agency teachers said they can now build up pension provision through their agency work - but with low employer contributions generally at the statutory minimum.

Umbrella companies and Limited companies

This year, 42% said that they are paid through an umbrella company or offshore payroll company, rather than being employed by the agency. This figure is lower by 5% than in 2014. This may be due to the different sample of respondents or may possibly be the start of a trend away from umbrella company employment following the changes to tax rules for such employment in April 2016.

This year's survey asked for the first time about "limited company" arrangements. 13% of respondents said they now work through limited company arrangements, although the NUT has significant reservations about these.

Over a quarter (29%) of respondents said that their agency insisted on teachers working through umbrella company or limited company arrangements.

"Supply register" operators

This year's survey asked respondents whether they had obtained work via supply register operators offering direct employment by schools - a model which the NUT wishes to see encouraged and adopted more widely - as opposed to traditional supply agencies. Very few respondents appeared to understand the question, unfortunately, suggesting that much more work is needed to establish registers as a familiar part of the system.

Derogation / permanent / “pay between assignments” contracts

Only 5% said that they had been asked to sign a contract of this kind, which removes rights under the Agency Worker Regulations to equal pay after 12 weeks, suggesting that they are perhaps less common than had been feared.

Cover supervisor work

As in the 2015 and 2014 surveys, almost one fifth of teachers had ‘accepted’ work offered as “cover supervisor” work – ie classroom supervision, not teaching work - which had turned out actually to require teaching. This is a low figure but still illustrates a worrying tendency by some schools to seek to secure supply teachers on even lower rates than those paid for supply teaching.

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, they replied that the main perceived advantage was access to more regular supply teaching work. The disadvantages were low pay, pay not reflecting experience, lack of entitlement to pensions, and “finders’ fees” which create 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.

Most agency teachers continue to be satisfied with support from schools, with 66% “usually” satisfied and 2% “always” satisfied, but this continues to mean that almost a third are “rarely” or “never” satisfied. Among those working directly with schools or via LA pools, however, 84% are “usually” or “always” satisfied.

Problems where reported continue to be similar in both groups, although their prevalence is typically greater amongst agency teachers. They include lack of information about individual pupils (75% of agency teachers and 55% of others); lack of access to teaching resources (70% and 75%); lack of access to planned work (55% and 40%); and lack of a named manager/contact (50% and 34%).

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

Current levels of access to work

Over half of agency teachers continue to say that they can get work when they want it, with more than one third able to obtain work over half the time and less than one in ten being offered no work for weeks at a time.

Availability of direct employment appears to have improved slightly – a little over half of respondents working in this way can currently obtain work when they want it, with almost a third finding work more than 50% of the time. In 2015 only 20% of those surveyed were able to obtain work more than half of the time. The proportion of respondents who were unable to find work for weeks at a time fell from over a quarter in 2015 to 19% in 2016.

Trends in access to work

This year, 35% of agency teachers and 41% of directly employed supply teachers said that getting work is becoming increasingly hard. The benefit of direct employment where it is available, however, remains better pay and access to the TPS.

Desire for permanent employment

Although less than a fifth of agency teachers now say they are working as supply teachers because they cannot find a permanent job, over twice as many (40%) would accept a permanent job if offered one. That figure continues to be significantly lower among those working directly with schools, since so many of them are retired already.

COMPOSITION OF THE SUPPLY TEACHER WORKFORCE

Gender

In gender terms, the composition of the response to this survey - which was 78% female - suggested that the supply teacher workforce continues to be very similar to the overall teacher workforce. This year's survey again suggested little difference in the experiences of men and women in relation to pay and other matters surveyed.

Age

As in previous years, the survey suggests that the supply teacher workforce is considerably older than the teaching workforce generally, with 53% of all respondents and 49% of agency teacher respondents being over 50, compared to only 20% of the total teaching workforce.

Teachers aged 30 or under, on the other hand, made up less than 10% of all respondents and of agency teacher respondents, compared to 26% of the overall teacher workforce.

Experience in regular teaching employment

As in previous years, the higher average age of supply teachers does not mean they also have greater experience in teaching. While 60% had over 10 years' experience in regular teaching, 27% of respondents had less than 5 years, of which 15% had less than 2 years. Among agency teachers, 57% of respondents had over 10 years' experience in regular teaching, but 30% had less than 5 years, of which 16% had less than 2 years.

Experience in supply teaching

The survey reaffirmed that for many teachers, supply teaching has become long term employment for 5 years or more. Nevertheless, a little over two thirds again said that they had less than 5 years' experience in supply teaching, with just over one third having less than 2 years.

Ethnicity

The survey found that 86% of supply teachers were White / White British compared to 87.5% in the whole workforce, while 3.1% were Black / Black British and 3.1% were Asian / Asian British compared to 2.2% and 3.7% in the whole workforce. These figures are largely unchanged from 2015.

As last year, teachers in the latter two groups were more likely to be younger and based in Greater London (and consequently paid slightly more on average) and much more likely to work for agencies. They were also more likely to be working as supply teachers because they had been unable to obtain permanent employment.

Sector in which employed

This year, over two thirds (68%) of all supply teachers said they predominantly teach in the primary sector, despite the fact that the regular teaching workforce is split almost 50-50 between the two sectors. The NUT's survey of schools use of supply teachers in October 2015 suggests that this could well be heavily influenced by the greater (and increasing) use of cover supervisors in secondary schools which reduces the employment of supply teachers in that sector.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NUT'S WORK

Most supply teachers continue to choose to work on this basis and - despite the well-known issues over pay and pensions for supply teachers - the sector continues to have its attractions for teachers who no longer wish to work on a full time basis in regular employment. That itself sends clear messages reinforcing the need for action to reduce workload and accountability pressures on teachers in regular employment.

Many teachers still, however, become supply teachers because they cannot find a permanent 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 paid less and denied access to pensions, yet agencies become ever dominant as the main or only source of supply teaching work. The 2016 survey, therefore, continues to demonstrate the need for a continuing campaign by the NUT for fair play for supply teachers in relation to pay, pensions and access to employment.