



June 2024

# Teacher recruitment and retention: lessons from 3 case studies

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Dr Iro Konstantinou

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# INTRODUCTION


The need for change and innovative solutions to problems in teacher recruitment and retention is more critical than ever. The issue was starkly highlighted by Dawson McLean, Economist at the NFER, who unpacked the recent report 'Teacher Labour Market in England' (McLean et al., 2024). The key issues identified around teacher recruitment are lower salaries compared to other graduate roles, increasing workloads, and limited opportunities for flexible working arrangements. The report identified certain trends which are worrying for teacher recruitment and retention:

- The challenge is more prevalent in the secondary sector compared to primary education.
- Leaving numbers have started to increase again after a dip during Covid-19.
- The NFER predicts that 11 out of 17 subjects are at risk of under-recruiting this year.
- Teacher pay growth has lagged the wider labour market since 2010/11.
- Hybrid/remote working remains much more prevalent in the wider graduate labour market.

They point to some positive progress in the last year: international recruitment, bursary rises, and increase in flexible working opportunities. However, the teacher supply challenge in England shows no signs of abating unless systemic change is implemented, especially around behavioural management and pastoral issues, pay scales, workload, and transparent flexible working patterns.

To address this pressing problem, we hosted a roundtable discussion featuring three case studies on how schools and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) are tackling these challenges. The discussion provided a platform for sharing diverse strategies and best practices, offering valuable insights into effective approaches for attracting and retaining teachers. Through these case studies, we explored practical and creative solutions that can help build a sustainable and thriving teaching workforce in our educational institutions.

# SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- There is the wider acknowledgement that London provides a much larger pool for teacher recruitment, which is not easy to replicate in other locations. The flipside of this is that London is very expensive and graduates might choose other professions which are better paid.
  - Maintaining close ties with a school's alumni can be beneficial as they can feed into the teacher body. They understand the school ethos and teaching philosophy and can showcase the subject knowledge that they have been taught.
  - Having connections with local universities which offer teacher training programmes can be potentially useful as they can provide a pipeline of potential applicants.
  - The teaching profession has not historically supported flexible working but more and more trusts and schools are exploring this as an option for teacher recruitment and retention. Offering flexible working is imperative in the current changing labour market landscape.
  - Continuous professional development and learning (CPDL) should be at the heart of initiatives which are aimed at teacher recruitment and retention. For CPDL to be purposeful, school leaders need to provide the strategic vision for its implementation.
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# THE CASE STUDY OF THE LONDON ACADEMY OF EXCELLENCE: SUBJECT SPECIALISM AT THE HEART OF TEACHING, ALEX CROSSMAN

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The London Academy of Excellence case study presented the importance of recruiting with academic excellence in mind. In most schools, there is a clash between intellectual stimulation and having a social impact. At LAE they try to maintain an intellectually dynamic environment whilst transforming the lives of disadvantaged students. During recruitment, they are unashamed about recruiting for academic excellence, with the result that 38% of their teachers have PhDs and everyone has a Masters degree. The process starts during interviews: they ask questions to challenge the academic expertise of prospective candidates such as 'What is the hardest concept in your A level curriculum and how do you teach it?' or 'What is the hardest concept that is not in your curriculum but should be?'. There was the acknowledgement that not all teachers can engage with such questions and often it is easier to have such conversations with younger teachers or those wanting to make the transition from the private sector.

LAE is growing as it moves into a purpose-built site, which will increase their student capacity by 50%, and they will be looking to hire more teachers. They have specific plans on how this can work:

- They are looking to tap into their alumni network to ensure high academic expertise as they know they have developed a passion for their subject during their time at LAE.
- They run residency programmes with PhD or Masters students and they hope to be able to retain some of these residents.
- They do not require a QTS for their teachers. This does not affect their pay scales and it ensures they are able to draw from a wider pool of candidates. They are happy to support teachers to obtain the qualification but they do not set strict timelines for this.

In order to retain their staff, LAE places emphasis on professional development (PD), and especially subject specific PD. This can be hard, especially especially given that less time is generally spent on subject-specific PD in more deprived areas. LAE have been trying hard to ensure they provide opportunities for subject expertise to be celebrated and for such development to take place. Currently, they are trialling a reading week where time is allocated to read up on subject specialism. Lead teachers in each department are responsible for driving that initiative.

# MAKING THE CASE FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING IN SCHOOLS: PIONEER EDUCATIONAL TRUST, ANTONIA SPINKS

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Flexible working has historically been seen as problematic, as it is not intuitive within the education sector. Experience, however, says it is a game changer and there are ways of making it work, since it can make a systemic change to the issues around teacher retention mentioned above in schools.

Antonia reviewed the work that Pioneer had done on flexible working:

- In 2019 they launched a staff survey which showed that staff would like more workplace flexibility than the trust was offering.
- They developed a flexible teacher talent framework alongside a consultancy. They then developed a strategy in consultation with unions and staff, which was implemented in 2020.
- In 2021 they became a DfE flexible working ambassador school, which meant they needed to work with five schools in London and develop resources for special schools around flexible working looking at specific challenges they had, such as the consistency of key workers. That involved working with Headteachers to better understand what schools needed in order to implement flexible working policies.
- They then became a flexible working MAT, which meant they started working with HR supporting schools and trusts in their policies.

As a MAT, they believe in three key priorities when setting out their flexible working approach:

1. Flexible working is a diversity, equity and inclusion imperative. The gender pay gap is particularly detrimental for schools and is often linked to caring responsibilities, rather than women, per se. It also leads into the pension pay gap. Flexible working can help to alleviate the disparities caused by the gender pay gap.
2. It is important to have an organisational culture that supports flexible working. Teachers have worked flexibly for years by working at home out of hours. There are also other elements of flexible working which happen in schools which are not formally recognised. We need to be transparent and formalise these structures into policy.
3. For flexible working to be successful there needs to be a strategy in place and it needs to be overseen strategically; it cannot be treated the same as all other HR issues.

Pioneer has 10 workplace pledges for their approach to work:

- This has 5 strands embedded in strategy:
  - Leadership needs to reflect flexible working
  - Offer flexibility to different staff depending on their roles
  - Have flexible hiring
  - Enable flexible progression, whereby people can progress even when working flexibly
  - Showcase flexible advocacy, by having the right culture to support flexible working

They offer two routes into flexible working:

- Statutory
- Flexible job design - not affecting their pay or budget.

On average, 30-40 staff have a flexible job design every year. Staff have reported feeling valued, supported, and more likely to stay with them because of the offer of flexibility. The flexible working patterns they offer vary but they centre around: where, when, how, how much? For example, there are options for working from home, compressed hours, part-time, job share, annualised hours, and flexi-time, with each school doing things differently since each role is unique. The MAT is very keen to accommodate as many staff as possible, the principle being that unless there is a reason why it can't work, they will try and accommodate the request. They also make a point of not asking anyone why they want to work flexibly.

Flexible working is a diversity, equity and inclusion imperative

# TEACHER RETENTION THROUGH CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING, PROFESSOR PHILIPPA CORDINGLEY (CUREE) AND MATT PERRY (HALIFAX ACADEMY)

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Philippa discussed research conducted by CUREE which looked at different nations and how they construct teachers' professional identities. They thought that satisfaction would be more about working practices, but it became apparent that teachers placed a lot of emphasis on professional development. According to the review of the evidence, school leaders who value continuous professional development and learning (CPDL):

- position CPDL as taking shared responsibility for high aspirations for pupil achievement and wellbeing
- focus on teachers' professional identities, practices and motivations as well as developing knowledge, skills and professional growth
- identify and build on existing knowledge, skills and beliefs
- model openness to professional/leadership learning
- mobilise specialist contributions to CPDL - including re-awakening their own specialist expertise so they can spot it in others
- align curriculum development and CPDL
- design structures/systems for managing complexity
- use tools to manage the cognitive, practical & emotional demands made by CPDL

Matt provided the case study of Halifax Academy where they have integrated CPDL as a key driver for teacher recruitment and retention. These are some of the guiding principles, centred around their values:

- Make time to talk about professional development and growth
- Have coaching conversations
- Offer pots of money for staff to do something in the community
- Have a high trust model which produces accountability
- Repurpose their meetings to be about staff voice
- Allow for creativity within a centralised system
- Introduce a flexible working model which places the people at the centre of it





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