

# Teacher Recruitment and Retention

## Engagement Findings

September 2024



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# 1. Engagement Summary

The following engagement summary offers an overview of the engagement programme design, delivery, and key findings.

## Background

1. The Children, Young People and Education Committee is conducting an inquiry into teacher recruitment and retention in Wales.
2. The Committee wished to hear directly from those with lived experience of teaching. The Citizen Engagement Team facilitated interviews, focus groups and a survey with current teachers as well as those who have recently left the profession. The Committee wished to hear from current teachers as well as those who have recently left the profession. The Citizen Engagement Team conducted a programme of focus groups, an online survey and conducted a number of interviews with this target audience. .

## Objectives

3. The objective of the interviews was to gather the views and experiences of teaching staff across primary, secondary and Additional Learning Needs settings ('ALN' hereafter) settings to better understand barriers to recruitment and what issues are affecting teacher retention.
4. Views were gathered to ensure that those with lived experience contributed to the evidence-gathering programme, with a specific focus on the following inquiry terms of reference:
  - **Barriers to recruitment:** Intake into Initial Teacher Education (ITE hereafter) and factors impacting recruitment into post (including a focus on priority subjects, Welsh medium, secondary schools, and the impact of Wales's educational reforms on teacher recruitment).
  - **Factors affecting retention:** (including a focus on priority subjects, Welsh medium, secondary schools, and the effectiveness of early career support).



- **School Leaders:** specific factors affecting recruitment and retention of school leaders.
- **Impact on learners:** of the current position on and the delivery of education and on wider support for learners.

## Methodology

**5.** Interviews and focus groups were conducted both online and in person. To accommodate teachers with limited time for engagement, a survey was also distributed to those who were unable to attend the sessions.

**6.** Qualitative data was gathered from classroom teachers, subject leaders, senior leadership teams and heads of schools across all school settings.

## Participants

**7.** A screening survey to gather expressions of interest in the engagement programme was shared widely across digital platforms and with key stakeholders, generating 170 responses.

**8.** As a result of these responses, the Citizen Engagement Manager engaged directly with 24 teachers through:

- 4 online focus groups
- 1 hybrid headteacher roundtable
- 8 online interviews
- 2 face-to-face interviews

**9.** In addition, 40 teachers and school leaders completed a survey designed for those unable to attend the engagement sessions.

**10.** Participants and respondents represent 26 constituencies.

## Key Findings

**11.** All participants and respondents agreed that recruiting and retaining teachers across Wales is a significant challenge. Heavy workloads, exacerbated by continuous new directives, as well as competition from other sectors is contributing to the pressures to recruit and retain teaching staff. This issue is

particularly felt in priority subjects, leadership roles as well as Welsh-medium schools.

**12.** Participants emphasised that excessive workload and lack of flexibility are major factors driving teachers away from the profession. They highlighted the constant pressure from the continuous new initiatives, which they experience alongside the daily demands and administrative duties of a teaching role. This leaves them with little time for personal life or recovery. Teachers noted that these demands are often exacerbated by staff shortages and high turnover, particularly in support roles, which increases the burden on remaining staff.

**13.** Teachers and school leaders also agreed that worsening student behaviour and the rising numbers of pupils with additional learning needs further increases the pressures on teachers, particularly when external specialist support and resources are limited.

**14.** Participants and respondents expressed their frustration at the negative public perception of teaching, which contributes to low recruitment levels into the profession. They noted that with already dwindling numbers of ITE students, there is concern about how the profession will sustain itself in the long term.

**15.** School leaders and teachers stressed that inadequate funding, external scrutiny, and limited professional development opportunities were all cited as issues which exacerbate these challenges, undermining school operations, teacher morale, and the overall quality of education provided to young people in Wales.

## 2. Engagement Findings

This section outlines the key themes, views, and solutions expressed by the people interviewed.

**16.** At the end of some of the themes below, we present a collection of solutions suggested by participants during the engagement sessions. These suggestions reflect the creativity and concerns of our participants.

### Recruitment challenges

**17.** Headteachers, school leaders and teachers all agreed that the current situation in terms of teacher recruitment and retention is reaching a crisis point, where the shortage of qualified staff is beginning to affect the quality of education and the ability of schools to meet the needs of their students.

*“The truth is really, in the last 12 years, we’ve seen a situation where recruitment was ok going to bad, and going from bad, to catastrophic.”*

*It feels like we’re in a downward spiral as a profession. All these aspects are accelerating us towards this downward spiral and there doesn’t seem to be anybody putting the brakes on. Whether it’s funding, whether it’s recruitment, whether it’s the quality of teachers, whether it’s that we’re backfilling police and mental health services and social services because they’re underfunded as well? The pressure on schools and school leaders has become almost unsustainable.” – Secondary Headteacher*

*“Does Wales have a strategy for recruitment?” – Secondary Headteacher*

**18.** School leaders and staff expressed their concern at the increasing difficulty in recruiting staff into vacant roles. They agree they have seen a significant and noticeable decrease in the number of applicants applying for vacant positions. This puts additional strain on an already stretched workforce, where teachers are being asked to cover additional responsibilities and subjects.

*"The stress and the strain it's [staff recruitment] putting on our existing teachers, and our senior leadership team is immeasurable at the moment. It's horrendous" – Secondary Headteacher*

**19.** Some school leaders also noted that recruitment challenges at secondary level now extend beyond traditionally prioritised subjects, with fewer subjects now considered easy to recruit for. Headteachers questioned whether enough is being done to tackle this.

*"Beyond P.E perhaps and maybe History, the challenges are huge and it's not getting any better. It's getting worse and worse every single year." – Secondary Headteacher*

*"I think we'll get to a point where we'll just run out of teachers I'm afraid. We'll have to stop teaching certain subjects." – Secondary Headteacher.*

**20.** Leaders acknowledged the difficult balance between maintaining high standards of learning and meeting the immediate need to cover classes. They note that this imbalance is becoming more pronounced as recruitment pressures grow.

*"When recruiting people, we're not looking at teaching and learning, we're employing people to put them in front of the classroom to have a teacher – whether they're a specialist, even if they're a specialist, whether they're any good, and you've got that huge imbalance between getting the best outcomes for children (which comes from high quality teaching and learning) and putting people in front of them who are in all honesty, are not up to the job. But what do you do?" – Secondary Headteacher*

*"We need to think outside the box as several other headteachers have referred to - try to upskill individuals in a second subject, a third subject and so on to ensure that we have a teacher in front of each class." – Secondary Headteacher*

*"Recruitment impacts on the quality of lessons being delivered." – Headteacher*

**21.** School leaders noted that geographical factors can influence recruitment for hard-to-fill roles, with English medium schools near the border able to draw from a wider pool of candidates, while Welsh medium schools in the north and west, facing a more limited number of applications.

*“We’re located in the north of Wales and I can look out of my window and see England. 80% of my staff are trained in England, so we’re in a system where the Welsh system can’t sustain us. Whenever we get a new English teacher, or if we’re lucky enough to get a Science teacher, they always come over the border – Cheshire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester, and the Wirral.” – Secondary headteacher*

**22.** Headteachers also expressed concern at the number of teachers leaving Wales to teach in England due to better funded systems and more effective retention strategies. They highlighted that there are several positive reasons to recruit people into Wales and these need to be promoted more strongly to attract and retain staff within the Welsh system.

*“We’ve got a very big, well-funded neighbour on our doorstep who are taking many of our best staff. Those people are going off to train in good universities, and they have really efficient systems to try and hold those staff, then keep them – including Welsh speaking staff. Then you’ve lost them essentially and they’re never going to come back to Wales.” – Secondary Headteacher*

## **Increased workload**

**23.** The issue of rising workloads emerged as a recurring theme among participants, with teachers highlighting its contribution to greater levels of fatigue and illness among staff. Many noted that this was a significant reason for the number of teachers leaving the profession.

**24.** Participants stated that teachers are increasingly expected to take on roles beyond their core teaching responsibilities, a trend that is contributing to burnout within the profession. One participant noted that teachers are often on the frontline of addressing students’ mental health needs, providing pastoral support, and managing increasingly challenging and extreme behaviour. This expansion of duties significantly adds to overall workload and exacerbates the stress experienced by teachers.

*“We’re not just teachers anymore. We’re social workers, we’re speech therapists, we’re physiotherapists, we’re occupational therapists, we’re dieticians, we’re counsellors. We’re everything. I don’t know how to prepare a teacher to come into all of that” – ALN school leader*

*“You’re almost like a social worker and you’re a parent. We’re getting children into nursery who aren’t toileted, you know? So we’re toileting all the time. Teaching children to use knives and forks. Teaching them to speak. You know, a lot of children are coming in, not talking- pre verbal children.” – Primary teacher*

**25.** It was also noted that teachers are facing increasing expectations, with additional demands arising from both government directives and whole-school initiatives. These requirements often add significantly to their workload, leading to the loss of free lessons and the need to take on extra responsibilities, such as overseeing additional activities and programmes. This also reduces the quieter periods of ‘downtime’ that traditionally follow once exam classes have left, further impacting opportunities for teachers to rest, plan, and recover.

*“I believe at this time of the year I would normally get more free lessons and everyone benefits from having these free lessons, but there are just more demands and expectations every year” - Head of Science*

**26.** Furthermore, participants pointed out that teachers often work during their holidays to prepare for classes, contradicting the perception that teachers benefit from excess holidays where they can rest and recover.

## **Staff wellbeing**

**27.** School leaders and teachers acknowledged that increasing workloads was having a profound detrimental impact on the overall wellbeing of staff within the profession.

*“One member of the department left because she was so unhappy in the profession. She said it sucked the life out of her” – Head of Languages*

**28.** Teachers and school leaders agreed that the rise of staff sickness had been significant and that the number of staff taking periods of long term sickness has increased. This has led to a reliance on supply teachers, which creates inconsistencies in the teaching and learning experienced by students. This is particularly difficult for those studying exams and can result in remaining staff working additional hours or lessons to ensure all students are caught up on curriculum requirements.

*“The disruption affected student learning and results - particularly in years 9 and 10. It was the disruption and lack of consistency in teachers.” – Secondary teacher (recently left)*

**29.** Teaching staff also reported that they felt “guilt” when taking time off for sickness. This is compounded by the expectation to contact the school as early as 7am and prepare lesson materials for their classes while absent. This adds further stress to periods of ill health.

*“When you call in sick, you feel guilty because you know someone else is going to have a really bad day because they’re covering you.” – Newly Qualified Teacher*

**30.** One headteacher observed that witnessing teachers under significant pressure and struggling with their wellbeing can function as a deterrent for ITE students during placements. She warned that such experiences risk discouraging student teachers from continuing with their training.

*“In order to attract people to the profession it is necessary to make sure that current teachers are happy in their work and promote it as a profession for the future. A lot needs to be done to ensure that the job still appeals to people who are still in the profession because they are the best advertisement for future teachers.” – Secondary Head teacher*

**31.** Headteachers, school leaders and teachers highlighted staff wellbeing as a key factor in retaining staff in the profession and while schools are able to put support systems in place, often these are not enough to retain staff.

*“We try and create an open culture where people feel valued, feel listened to.” – Secondary Headteacher*

## Change fatigue

**32.** Participants expressed concerns about the new curriculum and its implementation.

**33.** One participant highlighted that the complexity and frequent changes within the curriculum, makes it challenging for teachers to keep pace and understand requirements, resulting in inconsistencies in its application across schools. The ongoing expectation to adapt to these initiatives, in addition to the already demanding nature of teaching and learning, is adding to workload pressures and contributing to staff burnout.

*“Everyone’s buried under and then new interventions come in and it tips you over” – Secondary Teacher (Recently left the profession)*

**34.** Teachers reported that the vagueness in curriculum guidelines leads to varied interpretations, complicating their planning and delivery. The lack of clear guidelines in terms of how to assess the curriculum also leads to uncertainty and stress amongst staff.

*“You’re being pulled into different areas. Schools are being asked to be curriculum designers – which we’re not. To be assessment designers at Key Stage 3 – which we’re not. There’s positives to the Curriculum for Wales, but the whole system has not been thought through because as a consequence we haven’t really been able to focus on teaching and learning, which is our main job” – Headteacher*

**35.** One participant also critiqued the educational policies implemented following the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that while some schools adapted well, many teachers felt increased pressure to meet new standards without adequate support. She underlined that policies should be informed by the realities of teaching, ensuring that they consider the practical implications for educators – without adding additional stress.

**36.** One participant mentioned that increased scrutiny of teachers as a result of an increase in new initiatives can create a “toxic culture” in the workplace. She felt this came from parents, as well as senior management and external bodies. She explained that there was increasing pressure to meet expectations around

the new curriculum, as well as exams and student results, all of which impacted staff morale.

## Lack of flexibility and work–life balance

**37.** Participants and respondents to the survey noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has changed people's mindset about work-life balance, with more people experiencing greater flexibility in the workplace.

**38.** The inability to offer such flexibility in teaching is a significant drawback for recruiting and retaining people in the profession. Many of those interviewed who have left the profession, have stated that a desire for flexibility is one of the main reasons for doing so.

*“There’s absolutely no flexibility. Even if you had a day of no lessons, you had to be there [in school]. Even though we had been through the pandemic and proven that we could work from home.” – Secondary teacher (recently left)*

*“Teaching has not moved on with the times. Headteachers do not consider the need to provide flexible working and staff wellbeing is often neglected in the quest to maintain budgets and staffing.” – Secondary school leader*

**39.** Teachers reported significant challenges in balancing work and family life, particularly in relation to childcare. They expressed frustration at inflexible leave policies, which make it difficult to manage childcare needs, placing a particular strain on those with young families.

*“I wanted a family friendly career so I opted for teaching knowing I would have holidays and weekends off to spend with my family. I was so wrong indeed. I’m replaceable in work. I’m not replaceable in my family.”- Primary teacher (recently left the profession)*

*“If [my son] is ill... where do we find our childcare? We’re not able to just book days off.” – Primary teacher*

*“There needs to be some level of understanding... If we are struggling for childcare, there’s got to be some kind of leeway.” – Primary teacher*

*“That was the most difficult, challenging experience - having a very young family, and even only working two days, the pressures of teaching in a mainstream school setting. The basic demands of a teacher still exceeded my responsibilities. I was still bringing work home. Even though I was good at time management, there are still things that tip over.” – Primary teacher (recently left the profession)*

**40.** To improve work–life balance and better manage stress, participants noted a growing number of teaching staff seeking part-time or flexible working arrangements. However, school leaders highlighted the challenges in accommodating these requests due to budget constraints and the inherently restrictive structure of the school day. This issue is felt more keenly in secondary settings than primary settings and these difficulties are further exacerbated by rising staff sickness levels and ongoing challenges with recruitment and retention.

*“With fewer teachers in school, this means the number of people needing to wear several different hats is getting bigger and bigger. So we are at the point of not being able to give people those flexibilities they want because we’re just trying to operate in the first place.” – Secondary School Leader*

*“Trying to accommodate part time and flexible working in the timetable is one of my biggest headaches” – Secondary Headteacher*

**41.** Teachers and school leaders acknowledged that greater flexibility could improve recruitment and retention. However, given the current challenges in the profession, school leaders felt that without significant increases to budgets, offering such flexibility is unrealistic. They believe that without this, there would be significant sacrifices which would ultimately affect the quality of teaching and learning provided to students.

*“If you gave us, as a school, more money, would the first thing we spent that on be more flexibility for teachers – probably not? It would help retain teachers, yes, but there are other places for the money to go, such as providing resources to support students with additional learning needs.” – Secondary School Leader*

*"I think it would be brilliant if we could say to staff they could work one day a fortnight from home. I think they would really gain from that" – Secondary Headteacher*

*"My staff would really benefit from it [flexible working] – that 'time out'. But it's impossible to put into practice" – Secondary Headteacher*

## Recruitment into priority subjects

**42.** Secondary teachers and school leaders agreed that recruiting teachers for priority subjects is becoming increasingly difficult. Welsh-medium schools highlighted that language requirements further complicate recruitment for subjects that are already hard to fill.

*"Maths and science is continually a problem." – Secondary Headteacher*

**43.** Priority subject teachers are also concerned at the dwindling numbers of students studying these subjects in ITE settings - particularly within Welsh medium education. They expressed concern that this will only exacerbate existing recruitment challenges in the future.

*"I believe we've had four or five PGCE students in the ten years I've been here. I understand that there are about four or five (students) who are at Swansea university doing Physics through the Welsh language" - Head of Science*

**44.** Participants noted that certain subject specialists, such as those in science or IT, can gain employment in industries which offer better pay and flexibility than teaching.

*"It's because the disparity between teacher pay and IT professional pay is so huge. Why would they even bother when you could go and have a work from home job that starts you on 40 grand immediately?" – Secondary IT teacher*

*"We recently recruited for technology and we only had 3 applicants. Only 2 were suitable to shortlist. 15 years ago, you were recruiting and getting fields [of applicants] where you were really shortlisting, having*

*quality interactions in those days, and having difficult decisions to make. Now, you're shortlisting on the basis of how many apply and the shortlisting process in most areas, is not a shortlisting process."* – Secondary Headteacher

**45.** One Head of Science in a Welsh-medium secondary school described the increasing difficulty of recruiting teachers into the department, noting a significant decline in job applications in recent years. They also reported losing two science specialists, both of whom left to pursue alternative careers.

**46.** Priority subject specialists also expressed concern that recruitment and retention challenges could threaten the future provision of A Level courses. One head of department noted that long-term staff sickness and absences had influenced student subject choices, with some students opting for other schools or local colleges due to a lack of teaching consistency during key exam years. This has resulted in a reduced A Level intake in her science department.

**47.** Many school leaders and teachers expressed concern that recruitment and retention challenges, including priority subjects, are also resulting in more non-specialists teaching these subjects. This can have a significant impact on student progress and attainment.

*"We've just advertised for a Maths teacher because again, somebody has decided to leave the profession – a good, experienced teacher. We've had 5 applicants, two of them weren't even teachers, they just decided to throw their hat in the ring as non-qualified teachers. We've shortlisted three and actually only one of them is a mathematician."* – Secondary Headteacher

*"We have one Welsh teacher for 400 pupils. I went out for another one. One was History trained, another one was Religious Studies trained, both of whom happened to speak Welsh. Obviously the skill set for teaching Welsh is considerably different to History."* – Secondary Teacher

*"Pupils are aware that an increasing number of teachers are teaching outside of specialism"* – Secondary Teacher

**48.** More than one participant noted that a school's reputation can significantly influence its ability to recruit teachers for hard-to-fill subjects. A Welsh language

specialist observed that perceived “good” schools were more successful in attracting applicants to the department. In her experience, priority subject roles in less well-regarded schools were much harder to fill, often relying on long-term supply staff.

*“If you’re a Welsh teacher looking for a job and one of those schools is in special measures and you’ve got your pick of your schools, well I know if I was in that position, which school I would pick” – Secondary Headteacher*

**49.** Participants noted that difficulties in recruiting for priority subjects put certain departments at risk of reduced curriculum time. A Head of Languages voiced concern at cuts to international languages, with others echoing frustrations that reduced timetabling creates a cycle: languages are deprioritised, leading to lower uptake, which in turn makes them more vulnerable to further cuts.

*“International Languages has been squeezed out of the curriculum in most schools as Heads don’t see it as a priority and learners don’t want to learn another language on top of compulsory Welsh. This is causing a deficit in young people pursuing MFL to degree level and PGCE.” – Secondary teacher*

**50.** Teachers and school leaders agreed that the reduction in priority subjects such as the arts and languages risks undermining future teacher recruitment, while also discouraging students with a genuine passion for these areas from pursuing them further. They highlight however that with schools struggling with limited funding, running such courses with low student numbers is unfortunately unsustainable for many schools.

*“We shoot ourselves in the foot when we don’t run the courses like Art, like French - the subjects where there aren’t enough numbers choosing them to justify being able to run them in the sixth form. What do we do then is we lose more potential French teachers, Music teachers or Geography teachers... we lose opportunities to have teachers in the future in these minority subjects. It limits the number who enter the profession to teach those subjects in the future. But it is*

not sustainable for us as a school to run these courses." – Secondary Headteacher

**51.** School leaders expressed concern at the Government initiative to increase the allocated curriculum time for Welsh language lessons. One participant expressed frustration that given that this is an area which is exceedingly difficult to recruit in, it feels demanding to reach these targets. Several noted that these targets may vary by region, with some schools encountering different levels of difficulty in meeting them.

*"A lot of schools are really struggling to appoint Welsh [teaching] staff. To the extent where I no longer teach Welsh to everybody. I teach less Welsh now than I did 10 years ago, because the ability to recruit [Welsh teaching] staff is incredibly challenging. I'm not alone in that, there's a lot of schools in the same situation." – Secondary Headteacher*

*"I'm faced with a situation now, having to find 26 lessons of Welsh next year and I don't know where it's going to come from. Considering we're at the end of June, it is a catastrophe at the moment." – Secondary Headteacher*

*"As a Welsh-medium school we were in a situation two years ago, where we were unable to appoint, after a second or third advertisement, the position of a first language Welsh teacher - a permanent, full-time position. A few years ago we would not have had to draw a short list from a long list of those who had applied for that position. I can't believe we had to look at the third or fourth advertisement for the position of a Welsh teacher" – Secondary Headteacher*

## **Recruiting into leadership / pastoral roles**

**52.** There was widespread agreement amongst participants that recruiting teachers into pastoral leadership roles is becoming increasingly more challenging. School leaders and teachers both agree that this is as a result of an increase in challenging behaviour amongst students, as well as the heightened scrutiny the role attracts from senior leadership teams, parents, and multi-agency services. They highlighted that support from parents is crucial to ensure pastoral leaders are able to fulfil their roles effectively.

*“Those roles have a shelf life because it’s an incredibly difficult job. It’s an incredibly overwhelming job and that’s not helping the outlook of the profession.” – Secondary school leader*

*“Those staff that are ready to progress into middle and senior leadership, they see the stress, they see the strain placed on the senior leadership team, and a lot of them make a lifestyle choice... they choose to stay on Upper Pay Scale 3. The next time I lose a senior leader, I’m going to really struggle.” – Secondary headteacher*

*“I can see how many people say they don’t want it [a pastoral role] for their own mental health.” – Secondary headteacher*

*“One of our jobs as leaders is to try and convince people that this is a good pathway, that we need you in this role... that’s us trying to draw people up through the profession, whereas years ago they’d be fighting for those roles really. They don’t really want to do it anymore.” – Secondary headteacher*

**53.** One participant who had recently left the profession noted that they did not want to progress into senior leadership roles because it did not seem that this additional responsibility was “worth the stress.” They highlighted that if senior leadership roles are not appealing and you do not want to remain in the classroom, then, like them, you are likely, like they did, to end up leaving the profession altogether. Teachers and school leaders also agreed that the number of teachers flowing through the profession is incredibly low which is impacting recruitment at senior teaching levels.

*“[Leadership] roles never seem worth it. The stress of the job didn’t seem worth it.” – Secondary Teacher (recently left the profession)*

**54.** More than one school leader emphasised that recruiting beyond assistant headteacher role is particularly challenging and that very few senior teachers are willing to take on the responsibility of a deputy headteacher role. This is due to the increased responsibilities, stress, and limited financial reward of deputy head positions which make the progression less appealing.

**55.** School leaders noted that academic leadership roles are less challenging to fill, given their distance from the direct external scrutiny faced by pastoral

leaders. However, others noted that staff have been reluctant to take on head of department roles given the demanding nature of the work and the limited time to undertake additional responsibilities.

*“It doesn’t come with the additional time that allows them to do the job. You still need them teaching a significant amount.” – Secondary Headteacher*

**56.** When discussing strategies to retain staff into leadership roles through specific professional development opportunities, headteachers emphasised how difficult it is to accommodate staff requests to attend external training because of time commitments outside of the classroom, as well as the associated high costs. As much as they wanted to facilitate the necessary professional development, budget constraints from the challenges of sourcing additional cover often made these requests unfeasible.

**57.** Headteachers also described what they viewed as a ‘lottery’ across Wales in terms of the training opportunities available to middle leaders. They highlighted inconsistencies in provision depending on which consortium or local area schools are based in, creating inequities in professional development and progression pathways.

## **Public perception of teaching**

**58.** Participants expressed concerns about the negative public perception of teaching, especially heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**59.** Despite frustrations with a number of issues within teaching, several participants did express pride and satisfaction in their roles, stating that working with young people can be an enjoyable and valuable vocation.

**60.** One participant noted that there has been a significant amount of negative rhetoric surrounding teachers, leading to a lack of professional respect, which could deter potential entrants into the profession.

*“There’s quite... a negative view of teachers, and we don’t get an awful lot of professional respect anymore” – Primary Teacher*

*“It’s not seen as a profession like a doctor is, or a solicitor is.” – Primary headteacher*

**61.** More than one participant raised concerns about the media's portrayal of events involving teachers, noting that coverage is often skewed towards negative stories rather than positive achievements. They felt that instances of teacher misconduct or controversy receive disproportionate press attention, while examples of professional dedication and the positive contributions to the community are rarely reported.

*"People are seeing the negative media and that's a real problem...all you ever read is negativity around education and why would you be attracted to it as a youngster leaving university when all you see are the problems with behaviour, you see instances of staff being assaulted, you read the negative things that come from Estyn. You never see the positives of the job." – Secondary Headteacher*

**62.** They argued that this imbalance not only shapes public perception of the profession in a damaging way but can also contribute to low morale among staff and deter potential new teachers from considering teaching as a rewarding career.

*"If we really want a positive appreciation of the role teaching is, and the good work that goes on, then stop these things appearing in the press. The media love them, but they have a drip, drip effect on the profession. What we're seeing today is the impact of that." – Secondary Headteacher*

**63.** One headteacher raised an example of another school facing media backlash for removing music from their GCSE curriculum due to lack of demand. They argue that there should be more context in the press as to why decisions like this must be made as these instances can damage public perception of schools and teachers.

*"Putting a class on with 7 children, financially is not a viable option. So the media have a big part to play." – Secondary Headteacher*

**64.** One headteacher raised concern about the frequency of posts in online forums and social media groups where teachers seek advice on leaving the profession, observing that this contributes to a wider narrative of dissatisfaction within teaching.

**65.** Participants also highlighted the challenging dual perception of teaching. It is seen as both a difficult career load due to high workload and student behaviour, whilst also being an easy job which includes long holidays.

*“It’s very easy for people to say, ‘Oh well, you work nine till three and then you have thirteen weeks off a year.’ We know that’s not the case.” – Primary teacher*

## Student behaviour

**66.** Concerns around student behaviour were noted as a key deterrent to both entering into and staying in the profession.

*“Behaviour [of students] has gotten exponentially worse over the last few years.” – Secondary Teacher*

**67.** There is widespread agreement that student behaviour has worsened, with more pupils also entering school with additional learning or emotional needs. Participants linked this rise to post-COVID challenges, societal changes, and increased diagnoses.

*“There’s a consistent lack of respect and children’s attitudes towards learning in general when they talk to members of staff” – Head of Languages*

**68.** Teachers felt that mainstream schools are now catering to more complex ALN and behaviours without sufficient resources or specialist staff. Funding limitations mean insufficient LSA provision, making it hard to meet pupil needs or offer proper differentiation. Waiting lists for specialist placements and ALN services are long, leaving mainstream teachers under pressure.

**69.** One school leader said that it was the extreme behaviour of one student in her class which ultimately led to her walking away from the profession. They felt a lack of support from their Headteacher, combined with the school’s inability to handle one student’s extreme and often violent behaviour, left her with no option but to “walk away from the profession” or risk serious detriment to her health.

*“Three days a week, I was being kicked, bitten, having shoes, Chromebooks thrown at me. This is in a classroom where I was still trying to teach 16 other children I didn’t go to work to be hurt.” – Primary Assistant Headteacher (recently left the profession)*

**70.** Teachers stated that students who are experiencing trauma at home, which affects their behaviour and learning in school, are better recognised now. In response, schools are increasingly investing in trauma-informed practices to support these students and equip staff to manage more challenging needs. However, participants felt that the support currently available to schools and teachers is insufficient to address the more severe social and emotional needs of students.

*“The behaviours have increased, the children are coming in with a lower baseline... and the level of need is so extreme.” – Secondary teacher*

*“There’s definitely a more increasing awareness of the challenges we’re facing with behaviour that are putting people off.” – Primary School Leader*

**71.** Participants agreed that recruitment and retention is only exacerbating issues in students’ behaviours, as inconsistencies in staffing, reliance on supply teachers, and disrupted relationships can undermine the consistency and stability young people require in order to succeed in the classroom.

*“Some classes have a number of different teachers through the year; some children find it hard to make relationships and because of this we have seen an increase in incidents of unacceptable behaviour” – Primary Teacher*

*“Lack of consistency with teachers leading poor behaviour to spill over into other lessons. Children need and like familiarity and routine which they now often lack.” – Primary Teacher*

**72.** Teachers and school leaders agreed that while student behaviour has always presented challenges, managing parental responses and justifications can add an additional layer of difficulty to teacher’s roles. They emphasised that

strong parental support is essential in helping teachers manage student behaviour effectively.

## ALN support

**73.** Several participants highlighted the growing number of students with additional learning needs in mainstream settings. One participant criticised the lack of support from local authorities in meeting these needs, noting that this places extra pressure on schools, especially when they are supporting students with emotional, social, or neurodivergent needs, which require greater levels of assistance.

*“The level of need in a mainstream setting now... it is just quite surprising really. They just haven’t got the support.” – ALN Teacher*

*“[Teachers] have got more pressure on them because of the increasing needs of the children coming to schools who aren’t being supported with external provision... the number of children in mainstream school that wouldn’t have been there ten years ago is a real factor. That feeds into the retention and recruitment problem.” – Secondary Headteacher*

**74.** One ALN school leader highlighted the fact that ITE provision typically does not include a mandatory placement within an ALN setting. She believes that this would be beneficial to not only those who are thinking of working with students with additional needs, but would also be beneficial for mainstream staff to also gain experience as they can learn and use pedagogical skills and strategies which would be useful in mainstream settings. This would improve not only the quality of teaching across all settings but could also contribute positively to behaviour challenges experienced by teachers in mainstream schools.

*“It would be lovely if every single teacher in Wales had some form of experience working within the ALN sector even if it’s only for a half term. It will open your eyes to so many different strategies and so many different pedagogical approaches that you can use in mainstream to engage with learners.” – ALN School Leader*

## Concern over ITE student preparedness

**75.** School leaders and teachers expressed concern about the preparedness of Initial Teacher Education (hereafter referred to as ITE) students when they enter the classroom. They felt that in their experience, some early career teachers lack resilience and are not fully equipped for the realities of a full-time teaching role, including the wide range of additional responsibilities it entails.

*"I've had [ITE] students who have lasted a month maybe? I don't ask them to do anything more than the usual – just mark and teach children. They turn around and say, they don't want to be a teacher."  
– Head of Science*

*"I suppose teaching and getting a teaching qualification is viewed as less of a profession as other professions... we're dealing with little people and if you get their one chance at their education wrong, you know, that's catastrophic for the rest of their lives. You know, they get one shot with us, so you will only want the best, most professional people in front of them and that's not what we're getting." – Primary School Leader*

**76.** One participant highlighted the impact of Covid on teacher training, noting that some teachers have lost practical experience during the pandemic, which affects their readiness to teach.

**77.** Participants also highlighted that bursaries for priority subjects may be effective in getting students into PGCE courses, however many do not continue to stay within the profession due to more appealing opportunities in related industries. One headteacher suggested that a more successful approach could be to provide financial incentives over a longer period of time in order to keep those who have trained in the profession.

*"So many people use it as a 'finish university, not really quite sure what to do, why don't I do this and get paid for a year' option. There could be a greater incentive for the longer term. If there's to be a financial benefit for doing those courses, that should be over the next five to ten years, rather than 'here's 15 grand to do a year.'" – Secondary Headteacher*

*“We had one [student] for a high priority subject a couple of years ago who was very honest with us from day one and said they were only there to get some money and they didn’t know what they were going to do yet. They didn’t see it as a career path, they saw it as a one year stop gap and that person never went into teaching. Lasted until the end of the year, took the pay and then went and did something else.”*  
– Secondary Headteacher

**78.** One primary school leader noted that substantial professional development is needed to ensure new teachers are well-versed in the Curriculum for Wales, as they often begin without a full understanding of its key components. This places additional pressure on schools to provide sufficient support, which can enable new teachers to deliver the curriculum effectively.

**79.** Another headteacher highlighted that they have a strong partnership with one of the biggest ITE providers in Wales, however a third of the student cohort is Canadian. They expressed concern that these student teachers would then not be entering the profession in Wales, reducing again the available workforce.

*“Even when you’ve got numbers – which by the way have gone down every year – in one of the biggest training providers in Wales, you’ve not actually got people coming through into the profession.”*  
– Secondary Headteacher

**80.** Teachers and school leaders questioned whether current entry standards adequately prepare trainees for the profession, expressing concern that gaps in preparedness, professionalism, or qualifications could contribute to future recruitment and retention challenges. This may already be limiting the pool of teachers ready to step into leadership roles.

*“There’s not enough numbers, but there’s also a real quality issue as well”*- Secondary Headteacher

**81.** Newly Qualified Teachers (referred to as NQTs hereafter) and Early Career teachers however reported that they felt overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them at the start of their careers. One NQT felt frustration at the lack of “grace” shown for those who are teaching classes on their own for the first time.

*"It was expected that I had reports done for the first time with no experience and no guidance." – Newly Qualified Teacher*

**82.** It was reported that the support provided by ITE institutions and placement schools themselves plays a crucial role in shaping student teacher's training experiences and their subsequent outlook on the profession. Inconsistencies in support across providers and school placements can leave to varying levels of confidence amongst student teachers.

*"I would have liked to have taken the reins a little more [while on placement] because now I've got my own class, it's a shock to the system" – Newly Qualified Teacher*

### High turnover of support staff

**83.** Teachers and school leaders from special education settings emphasised that since Covid the turnover of support staff in their schools has been high, with pay cited as a major issue. This has placed a significant strain on their teachers, who require further support in catering to more students with diverse and challenging needs.

**84.** In ALN settings, teaching staff noted that these roles are particularly demanding, often involving intensive one-to-one support and personal care. This makes them central to the running of the school. However, one ALN headteacher noted that due to the low wages received, many of their support staff were now having to rely on the school's foodbank to survive.

*"If my teachers went on strike, I could open the school. If my TA's went on strike, we couldn't. They are the heart of what we do – we couldn't function without them."- ALN Headteacher*

*"I lose staff not because they don't love what they do, it's because they can't afford to live. I've had staff accessing foodbanks. We give them toiletries. So the sanitary products and things like that. So they don't have to buy those" – ALN Headteacher*

**85.** One school leader highlighted a recent recruitment process they had conducted for support staff had been disappointing, with very few applicants

who had the necessary skills and experience to undertake a Learning Support role.

**86.** Agencies sending unqualified candidates for temporary and full-time positions, can often complicate the recruitment process and impact further on teacher stress and workload.

*“We had 25 people apply [for Learning Support roles], which was good. But so many of those literally had no qualifications or no experience relevant to the role whatsoever, they just seem to think of it as like childcare or something” – Primary School Leader*

**87.** It is not only the shortage of teaching and learning roles that is impacting the teaching workforce and placing additional strain on school resources. One headteacher highlighted the challenge of filling other essential roles, noting that higher pay in other industries makes recruitment particularly difficult. For instance, their school was unable to appoint an Information Technology Systems Manager for two years, causing disruption to core functions such as registrations, timetables, and day-to-day technology systems. These processes are essential to the smooth running of school life and therefore created added pressures to teachers and school leaders.

*“We were in a position for two and a half years, where we failed, and failed to recruit (Information Technology Systems Manager) because working conditions in other sectors were more favourable. The wages are better. We looked at being more flexible in terms of working hours, in terms of working during the academic calendar... And still unable to recruit. So now we’ve had to buy into a service instead of employing an individual for the role.” – Secondary Headteacher*

## Career longevity

**88.** Several teachers said they would not choose the profession again if given the choice. Many know former colleagues who left the profession or retired early due to stress, pay, and workload. Some feel trapped financially in the role, especially once they’ve progressed on the pay scale.

*“Ten years in... I’m not sure it’s something I would do again.” – Primary School Leader*

*“Sadly, and I mean sadly, if I could move into a role where I could earn pretty much the same as what I earn, outside of education, I would do it – but I can’t. Which is really sad, because I love what I do, and the benefit you get from those children.” -Secondary Headteacher*

**89.** Those who have left teaching have cited workload and burnout as factors which have contributed to their decision to leaving the profession

*“I’ve noticed in teachers who might be sort of like 5-6, 7 years into the career, who are sort of like, well, I can’t do this forever. I know a couple of teachers who’ve jacked it in and gone to set up a private nursery” – Primary Deputy Head*

*“I have a number of staff who are in in their 30s - 40s who say they are just looking for a way out of education. They are just sad in their work” – Head of Science*

*“I know for a fact I am one of the very few of my cohort who are actually still [teaching].” – Primary School Leader*

*“I can’t see myself still teaching at 40. I don’t want to be arguing with kids and putting myself through stress.” – Secondary Teacher*

**90.** One participant mentioned that she never saw teaching as a job for life as she had been influenced by the experience of her parents who both taught for thirty years. She noted that their exhaustion at the end of their careers influenced her perception of teaching as a viable long-term career.

## **External scrutiny**

**91.** Headteachers raised concerns about Estyn’s scrutiny processes and the frameworks used to measure school success. They felt these frameworks are often “tick box exercises” which fail to consider the wider context and unique circumstances of individual schools. Leaders noted that such labels can damage a school’s reputation, making it harder to attract and retain high-quality staff.

**92.** The inspection process itself can also place significant pressure on teachers, negatively affecting morale and wellbeing. This further contributes to recruitment and retention challenges.

*“It’s judgemental and not supportive. I know of schools in north Wales who have been in special measures for six or seven years and you’ve got to look at that and say ‘is the system working?’*

*I know the morale in those two schools at the moment and the recruitment challenges in those two schools at the moment. I don’t think ESTYN have been very helpful in regard to that. Estyn feed the narrative of failing schools. It doesn’t help with recruitment, it doesn’t help with stress, it doesn’t help with anxiety. It doesn’t help with retention.*

*I know two staff in those schools who aren’t quite at retirement age but are fed up with it now. They’re done. They are two very good leaders, very good teachers, who have now walked away from the profession.” – Secondary Headteacher*

*“My Deputy Head is really keen to progress but after seeing Estyn he said to me – why would I put myself through that? What’s the point?”  
– Secondary Headteacher*

## Funding

**93.** Headteachers noted that they are struggling to maintain standards within a system they believe is underfunded. This impacts their ability to effectively allocate resources, fund professional development opportunities and provide adequate support where needed. This in turn, effects teacher morale and motivation, resulting in dissatisfaction amongst staff.

*“We’re running multi million pound businesses but in reality, lots of these businesses would have been shut down because they’re not effective. The funding isn’t there. So why would you encourage people to go into the job? It’s really sad because it’s such a rewarding career.”  
– Secondary Headteacher*

*“We are dealing with a funding crisis, not only in our own schools, but within the entire system. Social services, the police – we are back filling for them. So the requirements on schools to support youngsters, some with high tariff mental health issues, with family break downs, with huge vulnerabilities, is now at the core of what we do. But the funding for those things equally being withdrawn from us as it is*

*from everybody else. We are becoming an emergency service for our youngsters and there just isn't the money for that." – Secondary Headteacher*

## Solutions

In this section, we present a collection of ideas suggested by participants during the engagement sessions. These ideas represent diverse perspectives aimed at improving the current situation.

### Improved work-life balance and teacher wellbeing

**94.** All participants agreed that providing teaching staff with opportunities for flexibility would have a significant impact on retaining and recruiting staff into the profession. Solutions proposed by participants included offering flexible and home working arrangements where feasible, and rethinking timetables to allow greater autonomy over schedules.

**95.** They believe in order to tackle current recruitment and retention issues it is necessary to make teaching wages more competitive with other sectors which are currently attracting skilled staff away from teaching.

**96.** Headteachers also agreed that providing a “wraparound package of support” to mirror what private sector companies can offer would be beneficial to staff wellbeing. They suggested that a national approach would provide consistencies as to what benefit packages are available to staff and that by offering incentives such as gym memberships, electric car schemes, private counselling services and private healthcare packages would be effective in improving staff retention.

**97.** Headteachers noted that funding for wrap-around wellbeing support should be provided through national Government investment, rather than left to individual schools to resource, given that so many are struggling within significant deficits.

### Supportive professional development

**98.** Effective professional development offered to staff at all levels was highlighted as a necessary strategy to retain staff. Headteachers emphasised the need for a national, cohesive, and structured development pathway for teachers in Wales. They believe that this would be an effective solution to support

retention and enhance teaching quality, whilst also ensuring consistent progression opportunities and training across schools. They argued that a clear, well-resourced development pathway would not only build teachers' skills and confidence but also demonstrate tangible career progression. This would assist in making the profession more attractive and sustainable to newly qualified teachers, as well as experienced staff.

*"I don't think there's any proper teaching and learning development in Wales. Most of my career has been in England and there are clear structures and systems... Where is that in Wales? ESTYN constantly say it's an issue but nothing ever gets done about it.*

*How do you take those people, who are sometimes weak teachers, because of the nature of the fields we have them in and the pressure we're putting on them – how do you train them? When there's no real training plan in Wales at all to develop people in their craft. That's a devastating oversight for a country.*

*Some systems have very effective graduate courses and training... taking people from the beginning of their profession, training them for middle leadership, training for pastoral leadership, then training them towards senior leadership. There are courses out there but they're not coherent. There isn't a clear structure across Wales...and we're not that big a country so why aren't we able to put a system like that in place?" – Secondary Headteacher*

**99.** School leaders also highlighted that robust and tailored professional development is also integral to supporting teacher wellbeing. Investing in structured professional development and clear progression pathways helps staff build the skills, confidence, and understanding needed to take on leadership roles. This in turn helps teachers manage their workload and stress effectively, as well as feel supported in their career progression. They emphasised that investing in professional development models has ensured retention success in their own schools.

*"If they feel able to deliver on the responsibility they have, that enables them to manage their stress." – Secondary School Leader*

*It's investment in that professional development model that keeps our staff here....Staff feel valued and they feel their professional development is valued.” – Secondary Headteacher*

*“With any progression model it has to be sustainable – it has to be built into long term planning.” – Secondary School Leader*

**100.** ALN headteachers emphasised the success they have had in supporting Learning Support Assistants in undertaking teacher training courses. This approach has developed the existing workforce, whilst creating a pipeline of teaching staff who are already experienced in high-need settings.

## **Student behaviour and ALN support**

**101.** Teaching staff emphasised the need for increasing specialist support, and ensuring teachers receive training and practical experience in managing diverse needs. Suggestions also included mandatory placements in ALN settings during initial teacher education to equip teachers with strategies useful across mainstream classrooms.

**102.** In order to manage the diverse needs of their students, school leaders and teachers suggested improving pay and conditions for support staff to recognise the critical role these staff play in maintaining school functioning, particularly in high-need environments.

## **Improving ITE pipelines**

**103.** Proposed solutions to tackle low ITE numbers included extending financial incentives over a longer period to retain trained teachers, providing more robust support and development opportunities for new and existing staff, and ensuring that Welsh-medium and priority subject pathways are effective and sustainable.

**104.** Headteachers observed that while many PGCE and ITE students are trained in PE, high retention in these roles limits job opportunities in their specialty. They suggested restructuring ITE programs so students also train in a secondary subject, such as science, to address high-priority staffing needs.

**105.** Some school leaders praised the “Cynllun Pontio” course for successfully training primary teachers to teach at secondary level in the Welsh-medium sector and called for more government-funded transition courses to do the same in the English-medium sector.

**106.** School leaders and teaching staff also emphasised that promoting teaching as a career early on is imperative to encourage younger people to enter the profession. Using work experience is a useful opportunity to highlight the benefits of teaching.

*“There’s no point starting at university level – by then it’s too late. You need to be in schools recruiting [teachers]. Losing work experience, for example, a couple of years ago, was one of the most foolish things we ever did, and no doubt underpins some of the problems.” – Secondary Headteacher*

*“Need to recruit [young people] while they are in school not after graduation” – Primary Teacher*

## School funding

**107.** School leaders also expressed frustration at the financial challenges faced by schools and emphasised without greater funding, they are unable to effectively resource schools to best suit young people’s needs. This includes not only prioritising incentives to improve staff recruitment and retention (such as increased flexible working conditions) but to improve their ability to provide adequate numbers of support staff, conduct professional development opportunities and offer high value teaching and learning experiences.

*“Until school funding is significantly increased, there is not going to be attraction to the role, ...staff have got more responsibilities than they would have usually had”- Secondary Headteacher.*

*“With the current budget situation in schools, it’s impossible to offer staff flexibility” – Secondary Headteacher*

## Public perception of teaching

**108.** Teachers and school leaders suggested public communication of the profession’s value needs to be improved in order to attract high quality staff into the profession. They felt it was important highlighting achievements, and contextualising difficult school decisions, such as curriculum or staffing changes, to create greater public understanding and appreciation of teachers’ work.

# Annex 1: Interview and Focus Group Questions

The following interview questions served as a flexible guide for the interviewer and were not all asked of each participant.

**109.** The interviews and focus groups were participant-led, allowing for an organic conversation flow; questions were not presented in a specific order or exact wording but were used to facilitate discussion based on the participants' responses and needs.

## Current Teachers

1. What are the main factors that influence people's decisions to enter or not enter the teaching profession in Wales today?

- *Pay and recognition?*
- *Public perception of teachers/teaching?*
- *Impact of home working in other professions?*
- *Challenges in work/life balance?*

2. What impact have recent education reforms in Wales (e.g. the new Curriculum for Wales and ALN reforms) had on recruitment and retention of teachers or school leaders?

- *Is there enough support for teachers and school leaders to implement changes effectively?*
- *Are reforms hindering or helping the problem?*

3. What are the biggest challenges facing those who are staying in teaching?

- *Workload demands?*
- *Support from school leaders?*
- *Challenges in career progression or leadership opportunities?*
- *Mental health and teacher wellbeing?*

- *Pay and recognition?*
- *Behaviour in schools?*

4. What are the challenges in recruiting teachers for priority subjects (e.g., STEM, MFL and Welsh)?

- *Are there specific barriers that make these subjects harder to recruit for?*
- *What strategies could be implemented to attract more teachers into these areas?*
- *How can support be enhanced for teachers in priority subjects to improve retention?*

4. How effective is the support provided to NQTs in your school or setting?

- *What professional learning opportunities are there?*
- *What is the quality of mentoring process and inductions?*
- *How supportive are ITT institutions in this process?*

5. How are recruitment and retention challenges affecting your students?

- *What's the impact on student wellbeing and pastoral care?*
- *What's the impact on student academic outcomes?*

7. How reliant is your school or setting on supply teachers, and what impact does this have on learners and staff?

- *Effect on continuity of teaching and learning?*
- *Impact on student behaviour, wellbeing and attainment?*
- *Impact on school morale?*

9. Optional: Do you feel there are differences in recruitment and retention challenges between Welsh-medium and English-medium schools?

- *Do we need more targeted incentives for to Welsh medium provisions?*

10. What one change would have the biggest impact on improving teacher or leader retention in Wales?

## Teachers who have recently left the profession

1. What were the main factors that led to your decision to leave the teaching profession in Wales?
  - *Financial considerations?*
  - *Public perception of teaching?*
  - *Work-life balance challenges?*
  - *Impact of home working in other sectors?*
  - *Pupil behaviour?*
2. How did recent education reforms in Wales (e.g., the new Curriculum for Wales and ALN reforms) affect your decision to leave the profession?
  - *Were you provided with sufficient support to adapt to these changes?*
  - *Did these reforms contribute to your decision in any way (positively or negatively)?*
3. What were the biggest challenges you faced during your time in teaching that influenced your decision to leave?
  - *Workload and time demands?*
  - *Lack of support for teacher wellbeing?*
  - *Challenges in career progression or leadership opportunities?*
  - *Pay and recognition?*
  - *Behaviour in schools?*
4. How would you describe the support you received a NQT and early on in your career, if applicable? Did this affect your decision to leave?
  - *Were there sufficient professional learning opportunities?*
  - *Did you receive quality mentoring/induction and support?*
  - *How supportive was your ITT institution during this process?*

5. Did you feel that the challenges in teaching had any impact on your personal wellbeing?
    - *How did the job affect your mental health or work-life balance?*
    - *Did you feel supported by your school or leadership in addressing these challenges?*
  
  6. Did recruitment and retention challenges in the wider education system affect your decision to leave?
    - *Did staffing shortages, supply teacher use, or changes in leadership impact your teaching environment?*
    - *What effect did these factors have on your teaching experience?*
  
  7. Optional: Did you notice any differences in the challenges faced by teachers in Welsh-medium versus English-medium schools?
    - *Were there any specific pressures in the Welsh-medium sector that influenced your decision?*
    - *How could recruitment and retention strategies be better targeted in these settings?*
  
  8. What impact did your departure have on your students and their learning experience?
    - *How do you feel about the impact on student wellbeing and attainment when teachers leave the profession?*
    - *Were there any noticeable gaps or disruptions in student learning as a result of staff turnover?*
  
  9. Looking back, what do you think could have been done differently to prevent you from leaving the profession?
    - *What specific changes could have made a difference in your decision to stay?*
-

- *Are there policies or support systems you feel could be implemented to better support teachers?*

10. What one change would have had the biggest impact on your decision to remain in the teaching profession?

- *Workload, pay, career development, support for teachers' wellbeing – any other reasons?*

## **SLT and Headteachers**

1. What are the key challenges your school faces in recruiting new teachers?

- *Are there particular roles or subjects that are consistently hard to fill? (STEM, MFL, Welsh etc)*
- *Do you feel that teacher training courses are effective in recruiting new teachers?*
- *What role do geographical or language factors (e.g., rural location, Welsh-medium) play?*

2. How is teacher retention impacting your school or setting?

- *Are there trends in which types of staff/subject teachers are more likely to leave?*
- *What impact does turnover have on teaching and learning in your school?*

3. What support or strategies have you found most effective in retaining teachers?

- *Have you introduced any school specific strategies that are working well?*
- *How well do national recruitment initiatives align with your school needs?*

4. What is the impact of recent education reforms (e.g., Curriculum for Wales, ALN reform) on your roles as school leaders, and on your wider staff?

- *Are reforms adding to staff workload or providing opportunities for professional development?*
- *Do staff feel adequately supported in adapting to these changes?*

5. How would you describe the support available for NQTs in your school?

- *Are mentoring and induction programmes developed and well supported?*
- *What are the biggest barriers to supporting NQTs and early career teachers effectively?*

6. What are the main pressures on you personally as a school leader?

- *Workload, accountability, inspections?*
- *Availability of support (training etc)?*
- *Work/life balance?*
- *Teacher retention?*

7. Are you experiencing challenges in recruiting and retaining school leaders (deputies, heads of department, etc.)?

- *What deters staff from stepping into leadership roles?*
- *What professional development structures are in place to encourage progression?*

8. How do staffing challenges affect student attainment and wellbeing in your school?

- *Have staffing gaps made it harder to offer the support your students need—either academically or pastorally?*
- *How do students respond to frequent staff changes?*

9. How does your school use supply teachers, and what are the effects of this?

- *What are the financial, educational, or pastoral impacts on the school?*
- *Are there long-term alternatives being considered?*

10. What role do support staff and teaching assistants currently play in delivering education, and has this changed in recent years?

- *Have staffing responsibilities shifted?*
- *What has been the impact on teaching and learning?*

11. Optional: Do you see any differences between Welsh-medium and English-medium schools in terms of recruitment and retention?

- *Are there pressures or gaps specific to one language sector?*
- *Should there be more targeted incentives for Welsh-medium education?*

12. What support or changes would most help you to improve teacher retention and recruitment in your school?

- *Funding? Better mental health support? More effective recruitment pipelines? More flexible working policies?*

13. If you could make one change tomorrow to help address recruitment or retention in your school, what would it be?

## Annex 2: Survey

**110.** A short survey was shared during summer engagement events and with teaching staff who were not able to attend interviews or focus groups.

### Short Engagement Survey Questions

1. What are the biggest challenges facing those who are staying in teaching?
2. What are the challenges in recruiting teachers for priority subjects (e.g., STEM, MFL and Welsh)?
3. How are recruitment and retention challenges affecting your students?
4. What one change would have the biggest impact on improving teacher or leader retention in Wales?