



A comparison of job quality for teachers in private and state schools in the post-pandemic world

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Executive Summary

Since 2014 state schools have lost over 15,000 teachers in a net outflow to jobs in private schools, according to our calculations from the Independent Schools Association Annual Census. This exodus, which is a form of subsidy to the private sector, is in the context of the ongoing and worsening problem of teacher recruitment and retention in state schools.

This report presents findings from new research comparing the job quality, other than pay, of private and state school teachers in post-pandemic England and Wales, including those based at elite private schools, based on a survey of private and state school teachers who are members of the National Education Union. Information was obtained from 14,212 individuals, including 993 in private schools, some of whom were in 'top' private schools as delineated by a well-used guide for parents on academic achievements at schools which includes all well-known affluent schools.

Its key findings are:

- 60 percent of teachers in state schools say that they always come home from work exhausted, compared with 37 percent of teachers in 'top' private schools, and with 50 percent in other private schools. In the general population of non-teachers, this proportion is only around 18 percent.
- Private school teachers enjoy distinctly greater levels of task autonomy than state school teachers: 78 percent of teachers in top private schools, 70 percent of teachers in other private schools, and 60 percent in state schools report a great deal of choice over how to do their daily tasks.
- Generally, non-pay working conditions are better for teachers in private schools than state schools. However, some teachers in private schools express concerns about devaluation of their pensions, and many are expected to work at high intensity.
- The proportion of teachers who reported working at very high speed at least three quarters of the time is 86 percent in state schools, and 80 percent in private schools.
- The significance of these findings is amplified by psychological research, which shows that the effect of high work intensity on job strain is greater in situations of low task autonomy.
- In illustrative open comments, private school teachers report that they too have been facing challenging working conditions in recent years, especially in contrast with jobs in other professions. One unsatisfied teacher commented: "It's not good, expected to do too many hours. No work-life balance, no support from senior management, no support for my mental health".
- But there are even fewer favourable reports about their working conditions from state school teachers among the more than 10,000 received. Summing up, one teacher said she found teaching rewarding, but that she had, not only to teach, but "deal with mental health and pastoral issues throughout the day". She finished by declaring that "the working conditions and exhaustion make this job unsustainable for me long term."



No single factor lies behind the intensification of work. Previous research identified concerns, not just with teaching loads, but also with increasing levels of bureaucracy: two thirds of teachers report spending over half their working hours on tasks other than teaching. Work intensification also comes from the worry of inspections and from dealing with significant proportions of pupils living in the most disadvantaged catchment areas. The report calls on both government and private school leaders to redouble efforts to address problems of workload, and to collect and publish fuller information on inter-sectoral flows of teachers.

Introduction: the problem of teachers' job quality

This report presents findings from new research comparing the working conditions of private and state school teachers in post-pandemic England and Wales, based on a survey of teachers who are members of the National Education Union.

For some time, schools in England and Wales have been battling with a recruitment and retention problem, that occasionally threatens to turn into a crisis.¹ The teaching labour force is one of the largest groups of workers in the country, which must constantly be replenished as teachers retire, move abroad to teach or quit the profession entirely. The government is a key player in this labour market, funding teacher training and ultimately setting the pay and conditions in the dominant state sector. Also important, however, are the country's private schools, each operating independently, though partially connected to national norms through, for example, the Teachers' Pension Scheme. Although fewer than 7 percent of pupils in England and Wales are at private schools, the proportion of teachers in private schools is over twice that. Private schools affiliated to the Independent Schools Commission (ISC) employed 50,000 full-time teachers in 2019. While many teachers are recruited to the private schools sector directly from university, industry or from outside the UK, most are recruited

¹ McLean et al. 2023.

from state schools or directly from Initial Teacher Training (ITT). Using data from the ISC Annual Census, we calculate that since 2014 these schools alone have recruited some 22,900 full-time teachers from state schools and a further 3,900 straight from ITT.² There were far fewer moves in the opposite direction – that is, private school teachers switching to the state sector. Taking all these moves into account, there was a net flow of over 15,000 full-time teaching staff moving into the British private schools sector between 2014 and 2023.

Commonly, the response to the problems of recruitment and retention of state school teachers have focused on pay, which has lagged behind inflation regardless of sector. However, job quality is much broader than just pay and benefits. In recent years, academic research has highlighted the importance of a job's prospects (career potential and security), its degree of autonomy, the quality of its working time, its work intensity, and its social and physical environment.³ All these factors are known to contribute to what people look for in their jobs. For teachers, the issue over the past decade has been a combination of declining autonomy and, above all, work intensification.⁴ Despite repeated attempts by the Department of Education to understand better, and to get on top of the problem of high and rising workload, the issue is a possible reason why so many teachers quit the profession within the first five years.

No single factor lies behind the intensification of work. In fact, investigation of workload dissatisfaction identified concerns, not just teaching loads, but also increasing levels of bureaucracy.⁵ For example, two thirds of teachers and almost three out of four secondary school teachers reported spending over half their working hours on tasks other than teaching.⁶ Work intensification also comes from dealing with significant proportions of pupils living in the most disadvantaged catchment areas. This is exacerbated when teachers quit, leaving the remaining teachers to provide cover, and thereby raising workloads. Most notably, there is growing concern about the role of inspection agencies and the pressures these place on teachers and on those who support them in the classroom.⁷ In an earlier report, our analysis found indeed that job quality was worse in schools where staff are expecting an Ofsted inspection, and in schools located in areas of high deprivation.⁸ The latter finding is salient in light of the difficulties of recruitment in such areas, particularly specialist science teachers.

The report also found that the job quality of teaching professionals had barely changed since the pandemic and had, in some respects, worsened. Meanwhile, the job quality of comparable occupations has improved, especially in those occupations where it has become possible to work at least part of the time at home (so-called 'hybrid working').⁹ Thus, working conditions in schools have worsened in relative terms, compared to other jobs that teachers might do if they left the profession, or never joined in the first place. The cost-of-living crisis in post-pandemic Britain, alongside

² Figures extracted from ISC Census 2014–2023.

³ Eurofound 2012.

⁴ Green 2021.

⁵ CooperGibson Research 2018; Perryman and Calvert 2020.

⁶ Adams et al, 2023: 43–44.

⁷ Boustead 2022; Brady and Wilson 2022.

⁸ Felstead et al. 2023.

⁹ Davies and Felstead 2023.

diminished social insurance, appears from multiple witness reports to have also added significantly to teachers' workload, especially in deprived areas, as families' financial and social problems are brought to the teacher's door rather than seeking resolution through family support services.¹⁰

In contrast, in 2024 we find a private schools sector that feels beleaguered by the potential imposition of VAT on fees should the Labour party be elected to form the next government, and by other threats to their numbers, such as the perception that elite universities are intent on widening participation to those from less affluent backgrounds, and the declining population cohorts that currently affect many schools at the primary level. The schools are also affected by the increased cost of participation in the government's Teachers' Pension Scheme: some schools have withdrawn from the scheme, and some have faced industrial action from their staff in consequence.¹¹ Nevertheless, private schools are resilient, and there have been no overt signs of major teacher recruitment and retention problems in that sector. According to the IFS, moreover, the fee rises from VAT imposition would likely have relatively small effects, in practice, on parents' demand for private schooling.¹² During the pandemic, private schools and their pupils had better resources to cope with delivering home teaching, and far fewer problems with availability of laptops and home working space, compared with those children in poorer households. Private schools were more effective at delivering online teaching.¹³ Accordingly, in the post-pandemic classroom there were fewer educational catch-up needs to be addressed than in state schools, and fewer demands on teachers stemming from the social and care needs of children from poorer households.

Able to call on far greater financial resources, teacher-pupil ratios in private schools are approximately twice as high as they are in state schools, and private schools have invested more heavily in buildings, facilities and resources.¹⁴ With lower marking load, perhaps fewer (or different types of) behavioural issues, and the intrinsic benefits of teaching to smaller classes, the job quality for private school teachers has certain inherent advantages. Mitigating those advantages, however, many teachers may prefer to teach in state schools, potentially finding more of a 'calling' and achieving more of a sense of doing meaningful work when helping less affluent children succeed. Accordingly, private school managers need to offer sufficiently attractive jobs, in terms of both pay and working conditions, to attract and retain good teachers and indeed to be able to select specialist teachers for specialist classes. From this perspective, one might expect many non-pay aspects of job quality to be better in the private than in the state sector. It must also be recognised that private schools vary considerably in their command over resources, ranging from a handful of very low cost private schools, where expenditure is little different from that in state schools, all the way to elite private secondary schools that cost parents upwards of £30,000 a year per child, or £50,000 including boarding. Those highly affluent schools can reward their teachers more, and could be expected to do so if they want to attract and incentivise teachers who can provide an academic and extra-curricular educational experience to match parents' expectations.

10 Moss et al. 2021; CPAG 2023.

11 Daily Telegraph, 27/10/23.

12 Sibieta 2023.

13 Green 2021.

14 Green and Kynaston 2019; Sibieta 2023.

In short, it could be anticipated that non-pay job quality would be better in private schools, and even more so in the more affluent private schools. Whether this is the case is likely to be of interest both for teachers and for the school leaders who have to staff each school in a competitive labour market.

There are reasons, however, for more general interest among those concerned with the evolution of the educational landscape in Britain. The transfers between sectors noted above, when cumulated over the years, amount to a noticeable jolt to the teacher labour market. The state-to-private transfers constitute a hidden subsidy to the private sector when teachers, newly qualified within state schools, then enter private schools for their first job. The transfer may be exacerbated when they transfer after a few years' experience learning the trade of teaching in state schools. While the aggregate transfer figures do not indicate at what career stage the transfers are concentrated, anecdotal evidence suggests that many take place after the first few years' learning has passed.

In mitigation, it could be argued that some of those crossing over to the private sector are doing so because they are too unhappy working in the state sector, and that they would have left that sector anyway even if a private school had not offered alternative employment. In that sense, the private school job is an escape valve that preserves the teachers' expertise for the profession as a whole. It is not known how many, if any, of those who transfer fall into this category.

A second reason to try to understand more about the comparative working conditions of private school teachers is that, in the event of reforms to the private/state divide, whether mild or transformative, they would likely involve at least some private schools making a switch wholly or partly from the private to the state sector. Over time any successful reform would be expected to lead to a lessening of the resource gap between schools, but also to an opening up of access to currently-private schools for a wider, less socially exclusive clientele. The change would require modified skill sets to be learned, and entail potential disruptions to the relative pay and working conditions. When planning any such reforms, a better understanding of current gaps in working conditions would be needed.

There is, however, very little research that is available to the public on the non-pay job quality of private school teachers, and much of that is somewhat dated. A study in 2008 found that for men pay per hour was almost the same in the two sectors, while for women there was a small advantage for state sector teachers.¹⁵ During term time, private school teachers worked longer weekly hours than state school teachers, often working longer days and on Saturday mornings; but longer holidays for the private sector approximately balanced out the total working time over the year. A more recent study using qualitative methods identified different sources of extreme pressure between the sectors. It re-confirmed that workloads were significant stressors among state school teachers, but revealed that there were also considerable pressures on private school teachers from parents acting as vocal consumers of the service they were paying for.¹⁶

¹⁵ Green et al. 2008.

¹⁶ Brady and Wilson 2022.

In light of these considerations, this research addressed the following questions. How are private school working conditions different from those in state schools? And are there significant differences between the conditions of those working in ‘top’ private schools (likely to be more affluent) and those working in the rest of the sector?

Data and measures

To examine these questions, we make use of a survey of its members in England and Wales undertaken by the National Education Union (NEU) over 14 days in January and February 2023. It was therefore a survey of NEU members and not of all those working in education. Most respondents (92%) identified whether their school was fee-paying. In all, 14,212 individuals with corresponding information about their school took part, including 993 in private schools; 12,536 were teachers, 11,762 of whom were ‘classroom teachers’, 774 were senior managers such as head teachers, 1,676 were teaching assistants, or in other support roles. To examine biases within the NEU sample, we compared the profile of survey respondents – by sex, age, whether working part-time, region and phase of education – against national evidence taken from school censuses. This exercise was undertaken for teachers and teaching assistants in the state and private sectors. Where there were profile differences, weights were derived to give under-represented groups a higher weight in the analysis and vice versa. For each of the observable characteristics, a weight inversely proportional to the national estimate for that characteristic was derived. These weights were then multiplied to produce a survey weight which, when applied, moves the survey profile closer to the national profile as reported in school censuses. Nevertheless, though reasonably representative the sample was not drawn randomly.

Among those respondents in fee-paying schools, distinction was made between ‘top’ and other private secondary schools. ‘Top’ private schools were taken from the schools in “The Times Parent Power 2023 Performance Guide to Schools”. This annual guide lists the ‘top’ schools with the best exam performance results in each region. The historic Clarendon group of eight schools (Charterhouse, Eton, Harrow, Merchant Taylor’s, Rugby, Shrewsbury, St Paul’s, Westminster and Winchester) are all classified among the ‘top’ private schools. Exam performance serves here as an approximate measure of a school’s affluence. While the researchers of this report did not (and could not) identify the individual schools in which respondents were working, the NEU could do so. This information was added to the dataset on which this report is based. Altogether, 22 percent of private school teacher respondents worked in these ‘top’ schools. This proportion is higher than the population average, reflecting the composition of NEU membership and patterns of response to the survey.

Table 1 describes the sample used for the analysis that follows.

Table 1 Sample descriptives, weighted (%)

	State	Private (excl 'top')	'Top' Private	All
Profession				
Teacher*	92	97	98	93
Teaching assistant	8	3	2	7
Sex				
Female	74	69	62	74
Age				
Under 30	16	10	8	16
30 to 49	60	56	61	59
50 and over	24	34	31	25
Working				
Full-time	73	76	76	73
Career length				
Early (5 years or less)	15	13	8	15
Mid (6 to 19 years)	56	49	49	55
Long (20 years or more)	29	38	43	30
Region				
East Midlands	8	4	7	7
East of England	11	10	16	11
London	17	29	14	18
North East	5	2	8	6
North West	14	8	8	14
South East	15	25	16	16
South West	9	11	10	9
Wales	3	1	2	3
West Midlands	10	5	12	10
Yorkshire and Humberside	9	5	6	9
Settlement				
Urban	13	22	16	14

*includes teachers in senior management

Measures

The survey deployed short-form survey items that had previously been tested and validated.¹⁷ For this report, we focused on three areas of non-pay job quality: work intensity, task discretion and working time choice, because these areas of job quality had been identified in previous research as potentially problematic for teachers, and other research has found that these have substantive impacts on health and wellbeing.

'Work intensity' is the 'the rate of physical and/or mental input to work tasks performed during the working day'.¹⁸ Respondents were asked:

¹⁷ Felstead et al. 2019; Green 2021.

¹⁸ Green 2001, 56.

How often does your work involve working at very high speed? And how often does your work involve working to tight deadlines? Responses to both questions were given against a frequency scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘all the time’.

‘Task discretion’ is a measure of autonomy surrounding the work itself. Respondents were asked: How much influence do you personally have on ‘deciding what tasks you are to do?’ and on ‘deciding how you are to do the task?’. Responses ranged on a 4-point scale from ‘a great deal’ to ‘none at all’.

Working time choice is a major element of the quality of working time. Respondents were asked two questions: How much do you agree or disagree with the statement: ‘I can decide the time I start and finish work?’ Responses were against a 4-point scale from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’). Second, would you say that arranging to take an hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters is ‘Not difficult at all’, ‘Not too difficult’, ‘Somewhat difficult’ or ‘Very difficult’.

We also collected one (negative) outcome indicator from work, namely responses to the question: How often do you come home from work exhausted?, with responses against a 5-point frequency scale ranging from ‘always’ to ‘never’.

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question: “how good or bad are your working conditions and why?” Altogether there were text responses from 219 ‘top’ private school teachers, 633 other private school teachers, and 10,345 state school teachers. The inclusion of this question was not intended as the basis for a systematic qualitative study of the experiences of the state school and private schools, though that remains a potential avenue for further research. Rather, given the focus of this report, we make use here of the responses from the private school teachers to illustrate some of the quantitative findings through teachers’ perceptions of their own jobs. Many of these qualitative responses focus on the same dimensions of job quality that are measured quantitatively in the survey questions outlined above.

Quantitative findings

Table 2 presents our findings for the three dimensions of non-pay job quality in focus for this report, and for teacher exhaustion.

Work intensity

The first two rows show that work intensity is very high for teachers in this sample, but not quite so high in private as in state schools. Thus, the proportion who reported working at very high speed at least three quarters of the time is 86 percent in state schools, and 80 percent in private schools.¹⁹ Similarly, there were fewer private (84 percent) than state school teachers (89 percent) who reported working with high frequency to tight deadlines, but in both sectors work is reported to be very intensive. In both dimensions of work intensity, there is no gap between teachers in top and other private schools.

¹⁹ For context, the proportion for the whole population of professional workers apart from teachers was 52 percent in 2017 (Green 2021). A direct comparison would not be valid, however, given the selective nature of the NEU sample.

Task autonomy

The next two rows of Table 2 show that private school teachers enjoy distinctly greater levels of task autonomy than state school teachers, both in terms of task selection (47 percent versus 39 percent) and methods (72 percent versus 60 percent). Moreover, with respect to methods, teachers in top private schools have distinctly greater autonomy than other private school teachers (78 percent versus 70 percent). The significance of this finding is amplified by psychological research across many areas of employment, which shows that the effect of high work intensity on the chances of job strain or – at the extreme, burn-out – is greater in situations of low task autonomy.²⁰

Working time choice

The third element of job quality, concerning the quality of working time, presents a mixed picture. Private school teachers are less able than state school teachers to decide the times they start and finish work (15 percent versus 23 percent) but have more freedom to take emergency time off work for personal or family matters (18 percent versus 12 percent). Teachers in top private schools are, again, better off in this respect (22 percent versus 17 percent).

Exhaustion

The final row of the table sums up the outcome of the many differences between working in private and state schools (including those we have just examined). A substantial proportion of ‘other’ private school teachers (50 percent) report that they always come home from work exhausted, more than those in top private schools (37 percent). However, the proportion is even greater in state schools (60 percent). Typically, in the general population, the response would be around 18 percent.²¹

20 Karasek and Theorell 1990.

21 Authors’ analysis of data from the British Skills and Employment Survey 2017.

Table 2 Non-Pay Job Quality and Outcomes in State and Private Schools

	State (%)	All Private (%)	Private (excluding 'top') (%)	'Top' Private (%)	'Top' vs other private (statistical difference)
Work Intensity					
Working at very high speed three-quarters or more of the time	86	80***	80***	81**	Ns
Working to tight deadline three-quarters or more of the time	89	84***	84***	84*	Ns
Task Discretion					
A great deal of influence over what tasks are to be done	39	47***	47***	52***	Ns
A great deal of influence over how to do the tasks	60	72***	70***	78***	*
Working Time Choice					
Strongly agree or agree that 'I can decide the time I start and finish work'	23	15***	15***	17**	Ns
'Not difficult at all' or 'not too difficult' to take time off to take care of personal or family matters	12	18***	17***	22***	***
Job Quality Outcome					
Always exhausted after work	60	48***	50***	37***	***

Note: Significance from bivariate testing, p. => 1%***, 5%***, 10%* compared to the state sector, except the final column comparing top private and other private responses.

Qualitative illustrations

In this section, we illustrate some of the findings above with some descriptions from private school teachers in response to our open-ended invitation to comment on their working conditions.

Some of the open-ended comments from private school teachers show substantial satisfaction with their working conditions as they apply to their own jobs, and make favourable comparisons with state school jobs. One teacher from a 'top' private school notes: "Good (working conditions). Supportive staff and leadership team. Plenty of resources. No major behaviour issues. Narrower range of abilities in class. Top down pressure significantly less than state. More free periods for planning and marking and longer holidays to recover." (Female, full-time, 4 years' experience). Examples of other comments in the same vein are: "Very good (working conditions), because we are a private girls school" (Female, full-time, 18 years' experience). "(Conditions are) pretty good if we are talking about student ratios, work load!" (Female, full-time, 15 years' experience); and "(conditions are) generally good. Great colleagues. Pupils usually want

to learn. Classrooms have the required space and technology. I have an allocated work 'office' space and lunch is provided. Free tea/coffee." (Female, full-time, 22 years' experience). The potential for compensating pay differentials is also recognised, with one teacher stating "Ok. I have taken a pay cut to move out of state education to improve work life balance" (Female, full-time, 16 years' experience).

Nevertheless, private school teachers also report serious issues with their working conditions, suggesting that work intensity is high also for them, and potentially getting worse. One writes that conditions are "good when compared to most schools" but that "added responsibilities have really made (the) job and hours difficult" (Male, full-time, 4 years' experience). Another replies "good but exhausting as terms are shorter but curriculum is the same as for (the) state sector" (Female, part-time, 30 years' experience). A third states that conditions are "good, but increasingly pressured with less time to do my original teaching job" (Female, full-time, 12 years' experience). A fourth goes into further detail, saying that she had "Great colleagues and kids but (the) workload is huge. Mostly manageable (especially the teaching) but it's all the extras that add up. I'm working at 100% capacity from the moment I arrive (7.30am) till I leave (5.30pm ish depending on evening). A lot is expected of us and we're expected to deliver perfectly. I don't think we're given enough time in the day, just expected to make it work whatever the cost. I know people who have kids at home find this nearly impossible" (Female, full-time, 5 years' experience). Another is seriously unsatisfied, complaining "It's not good, expected to do too many hours. No work-life balance, no support from senior management, no support for my mental health" (Male, full-time, support staff, 7 years' experience). One comment re-affirms the finding that parents are a real source of pressure: "I am lucky enough to have a small class size. However, as it's fee paying we do work hard to please our 'customers'. Lots of out of hours expectations AND they are trying to take our pensions away!!!!" (Female, full-time, 25 years' experience).

While this sense that working conditions may be getting worse should not be accepted at face value, and would require a more comprehensive monitoring of working conditions over time, ten other teachers also mention the fear of pension loss. For example, another writes: "Pay freeze or below inflation pay rises for last 3 years, having to strike to protect teachers' pension, more work and responsibility added without more non-contact time or pay, my conditions are noticeably and significantly worse than 5 years ago." (Female, full-time, 9 years' experience) Another comments: "Approach to staff wellbeing is comical, with the idea that pizzas in the staff room are a substitute for fair pay and competitive pensions." (Male, full-time, 4 years' experience). Unfortunately we did not include a question about pensions in our survey, so cannot report the full extent to which this remains an issue for private school teachers. With the potential for ongoing conflict over pensions, however, it will be important for private schools to monitor this source of discontent.

Relatively few private school teachers comment about their sense of control and autonomy in the classroom, and when they do their thoughts are favourable. For example, one private school teacher states: "Good We have a lot of control over how we teach and manage our classroom" (Female,

part-time, 22 years' experience). Another said that he/she was "trusted to do my job and am not subject to invasive monitoring and a bullying management style unlike in some other schools." (Female, full-time, 10 years' experience). In contrast, when state school teachers comment on autonomy it is to complain of lack of control, as illustrated by one who said "Poor. No flexibility. Not treated as a professional," (Female, full-time with 5 years' experience); or another who said "Not good. Relentless changing ways of doing things. Deadline on deadline. Tasks of no benefit for anyone. Shamed if miss deadlines. No control over day" (Male, full-time, 29 years' experience).

The familiar problem cited most commonly by private sector teachers was the very long hours during term times. One sums up the issue succinctly by commenting that: "Conditions are ok but long hours are required" (Unknown Sex, full-time, 22 years' experience). Even though, as we have seen from the quantitative responses, private schools have somewhat greater flexibility than state school teachers to take time off, neither sector reports flexibility except for a minority of cases. One teacher from that fortunate minority appreciated the value of this flexibility, stating "Our school is good at giving time off for personal reasons, doctors appts etc." (Female, full-time, 17 years' experience). But another private school teacher makes the more typical comment: "Very high workload and long hours. Very little flexibility" (Male, full-time, 5 years' experience). Another private school teacher highlights the 'always-on' problem found sometimes in non-teaching occupations where employers keep tabs on and expect to be able to contact their employees out of hours: "I do not have sufficient time off during term time - always on duty overnight and even when 'off' I am on call." (Female, full-time, 4 years' experience). Another expressed even greater dissatisfaction: "Expectation to attend out of hours meetings, parent meetings, workshops. Just appalling. Headteacher a bully." (Male, full-time, 20 years' experience).

It is evident that private school teachers have been facing challenging working conditions in recent years, especially in contrast with jobs in other professions. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there remains a contrast with the bulk of the comments made by state school teachers in response to the same question. There are few favourable comments from state school teachers among the more than 10,000 received. The following is typical, from a female state-school teacher with six years teaching experience. She complained of unnecessary tasks; of having 'little say over big decisions'; of the "100s of hours we do in our own time are not counted or rewarded" including in school holidays; that "students, parents and staff can now contact you constantly online"; that she had, not only to teach but "deal with mental health and pastoral issues throughout the day". Though she found teaching rewarding, she finished by declaring that "the working conditions and exhaustion make this job unsustainable for me long term." This teacher's recognition of the lack of sustainability of teaching as a job echoes neatly sums up the problem of job quality that lies behind the long-term staffing problem in our state schools. Nevertheless, the private schools sector is by no means immune from the pressures on teachers' jobs.

Conclusions

Overall, the non-pay working conditions of private school teachers appear from our survey findings to be better than those found in state schools. In particular, private school teachers work somewhat less intensely, enjoy somewhat greater autonomy over their teaching, and are less frequently exhausted after each day's work. Top private school teachers fare better still than those in the majority of private schools. Studies from around the world confirm that non-pay job quality has major effects on health and wellbeing, and therefore it would be plausible to argue that this gap lies behind the net transfer of teachers from state to private schools. Further research would be needed to test that argument. Nevertheless, our survey and the open-text responses also reveal some similar issues facing teachers in the two sectors, including high work intensity and rates of exhaustion that are far higher than those in the general employed population. Moreover, some private school teachers are reporting concern over devalued pension benefits, where schools opt to leave the Teachers Pension Scheme.

While recent debate has focused on the proper contribution of private schools to the education system and the plans of the Labour Party to levy VAT on fees, the between-sector hidden subsidy implied by the switching of teachers is rarely discussed. Future reforms of the private/state divide in the education system, if they were to occur, could lead to a reduced separation of private from state schools, and hence more mobility of staff between the sectors. Under such circumstances, labour market competition for teachers would be expected to lead to working conditions narrowing over time. At the same time, given the persistent problems of recruitment and retention in teaching, the working conditions of all teachers will have to be improved, if staffing numbers are to be maintained.

As of the present, our research supports the need for both government and private school leaders to redouble efforts to manage teacher workload more effectively, to respect the professional ethos of teachers rather than chipping away at teacher autonomy, and to advance working time flexibility for teachers as far as possible within the constraints of the education timetable. The research also has implications for addressing the imbalance of teacher flows between the state and private sectors. While some transitions between schools and sectors should be seen as healthy and potentially contributing to innovation and learning processes, the current imbalance needs to be better monitored by those responsible for the management of the teacher labour market. The transition numbers monitored by the Independent Schools Council understate total transitions, since they cover only 54 percent of all private schools (85 percent of pupils). Little is known, moreover, about the numbers of qualified teachers who leave to teach in schools in other countries, and the numbers of those who return. We recommend therefore that the education ministries in England, Scotland and Wales should collect and publish information on these transitions, with a view to addressing imbalances and the hidden subsidies that they imply.

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