



THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF TEACHERS IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Key findings

- ◆ Departments with the highest number of unfilled posts included: English (11 unfilled posts), Mathematics (10), the Sciences (10), Home Economics (10), Technology & Design (7), History and Physical Education (5 in both cases).
- ◆ While some principals (24%) had difficulty in recruiting Physics teachers, only one unfilled post was reported. Similarly, although some schools (7%) had problems recruiting Chemistry teachers, no unfilled posts were reported.
- ◆ Obtaining appropriate substitute cover for Mathematics, Science, Technology & Design, Home Economics, Music and ICT was a problem for some principals (15%), mostly in non-grammar schools.
- ◆ Teacher shortages negatively impacted on curricular planning, the range of activities available and the range of subjects offered by

schools. Non grammar schools and schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board appeared most affected.

- ◆ Strategies aimed at addressing teacher shortages included: limiting the number of specialist subjects offered, deploying under qualified staff to teach non-exam classes and subject specialists to teach exam classes, and rotating practical classes or offering theory but no practical experience.
- ◆ The number of pupils taking Key Stage 4 and post 16 qualifications was robust in shortage areas. Similarly, the number of applicants to initial teacher education institutions in Northern Ireland remained relatively high.
- ◆ The number of places offered in shortage subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Technology & Design, IT and Home Economics remained low.
- ◆ There was a decline in the number of males applying to all teacher education courses.

INTRODUCTION

1. A thorough review of the extant literature reveals a paucity of research into teacher shortages in Northern Ireland. Factors contributing to the lack of attention afforded this issue include the assumption that Northern Ireland *'do[es] not have the dreadful problems with teacher supply [like] they have in England'* (UTU, 2003) and the view that high retention rates among newly qualified teachers are indicative of the fact that teaching is considered a life long career (OECD, 2002b). Nevertheless, teacher shortages have been identified in subjects such as the Sciences, particularly Physics, Mathematics, Technology and Design and Home Economics (OECD, 2002b). At the same time, the Northern Ireland Teacher Education Committee (NITEC, 2002) reported a significant decline in the number of students registering for PGCE courses in Physics. Specifically, statistics for Physics and Chemistry show that between 1995 and 2000 the number of graduates in Physics and Chemistry fell from 420 to 187 and from 528 to 363 respectively. Although the figures for Chemistry appear robust, Doherty et al (2000) claim they are distorted by the inclusion of high numbers of Biochemistry graduates registering for Chemistry PGCE courses. Similar shortfalls have been reported for PGCE Mathematics and Technology and Design courses. According to McNair (2002), over the last four years there has been a significant decrease in the number of entrants to Technology and Design teacher training courses, consequently schools are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit qualified staff to cover teacher absences. In a similar vein, the NI Steering Group for Numeracy (Campbell, 2003) estimates there are at least 20 unfilled Mathematics posts in the post-primary sector, with schools experiencing problems recruiting substitute teachers in this subject. Allied with recruitment problems, the age profile of teachers in Science, Mathematics and Technology and Design gives cause for concern, with teachers in these areas tending to be older than their counterparts in other subject areas (NITEC, 2002; Roberts, 2002).
2. In light of these concerns, the present study was commissioned by the Department of Education in 2003 to examine patterns of teacher recruitment and retention in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

3. The research aimed to examine a number of key issues:
 - ◆ the number of teachers in subject departments;
 - ◆ the qualifications and experience of teachers in subject departments;
 - ◆ the age profile of teachers in subject departments;
 - ◆ the predicted changes in staffing in subject departments;
 - ◆ recruitment patterns by subject department;
 - ◆ difficulties encountered in recruiting staff, by subject;
 - ◆ current vacancies.

MAIN FINDINGS

Unfilled posts

4. A total of 86 posts were reported as 'unfilled' by respondents to the Heads of Department questionnaire (n = 160). This number includes 55 permanent full-time, 12 permanent part-time, 8 temporary full-time and 11 temporary part-time posts. Almost three quarters (74%) of these vacancies were in the non-grammar school sector. Similar figures are reported for Scotland (n = 89) and Wales (n = 82).
5. Departments with the highest number of unfilled posts included: English (n = 11), Mathematics (n = 10), the Sciences (n = 10), Home Economics (n = 10), Technology & Design (n = 7), History and Physical Education (n = 5 in both).
6. While some principals (24%) had difficulty in recruiting Physics teachers, only one unfilled post was reported in the Heads of

Department questionnaire. Similarly, although some schools (7%) had problems recruiting Chemistry teachers, no unfilled posts were reported.

7. Obtaining appropriate substitute cover for Mathematics, Science, Technology & Design, Home Economics, Music and ICT was a problem for some principals (15%), mostly in non-grammar schools.
8. Teacher shortages negatively impacted on curricular planning, the range of activities available and the range of subjects offered by schools. Non-grammar schools and schools in the Belfast Education and Library Board appeared most affected.
9. Strategies aimed at addressing teacher shortages included: limiting the number of specialist subjects offered, deploying under-qualified staff to teach non-exam classes and subject specialists to teach exam classes, rotating practical classes or offering theory but no practical experience. Though effective in the short term, in the long term these shortages may mask the full extent of teacher shortages.

Table 1. Filled and unfilled posts by school type.

	Non-Grammar Schools		Grammar Schools		Totals	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Filled						
Permanent Full-time	2801	82	1876	83	4677	83
Permanent Part-time	467	14	294	13	761	13
Temporary Full-time	73	2	41	2	114	2
Temporary Part-time	63	2	49	2	112	2
TOTAL	3404	100	2260	100	5664	100
Unfilled						
Permanent Full-time	42	66	13	59	55	64
Permanent Part-time	7	11	5	23	12	14
Temporary Full-time	8	12	0	0	8	9
Temporary Part-time	7	11	4	18	11	13
TOTAL	64	100	22	100	86	100

Filled posts

10. The majority of teachers (83%) in the post-primary sector were employed on full-time permanent contracts. A further 13% were employed on permanent part-time contracts, with a small number employed on temporary full-time and part-time contracts (2% for both). Similar patterns were obtained for grammar and non-grammar schools.
11. Most teachers employed in the post-primary sector were female (60%). Subjects with the highest proportion of female teachers included: Home Economics (99%), Special Needs (86%), Art and Design (75%), English (71%), Religious Studies (69%), and Music (67%).

12. More male teachers were employed in Technology & Design (88%), Physics (62%), ICT (54%) and Careers (52%).
13. The majority of teachers in the post-primary sector were aged between 25 and 54 (90%), with a small percentage aged less than 24 (3%) or more than 55 (7%).
14. Teachers on temporary full-time contracts tended to be in the younger age brackets - 75% are between 18 and 34 years of age - and to have less than 5 years' teaching experience (75%).
15. Staff retention did not appear to present a major problem for most schools in Northern Ireland. Of the 83% employed in permanent full-time posts, 73% had between 6 and 29 years' teaching experience.

Initial teacher education - secondary data analysis

16. The number of pupils taking Key Stage 4 and post-16 qualifications was robust in shortage areas. Similarly, the number of applicants to initial teacher education institutions in Northern Ireland remained relatively high.
17. The number of places offered in shortage subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, Technology & Design, IT and Home Economics remained low.
18. There was a decline in the number of males applying to all teacher education courses.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

19. From the research it appears that some non-grammar schools, especially those in inner city areas, were experiencing problems with the recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff. To ensure that teaching and learning in these schools are not compromised by staff shortages, a review of the level of support provided and the packages available to attract high calibre staff is warranted.

20. Comparative data analysis between the number of students entering the five initial teacher education institutions is confounded by differences in the collation, organisation and reporting of data. Consideration should be given to standardising the methods employed by these institutions to monitor the numbers entering each subject area in each year.
21. An examination of the employment patterns of completing students would serve to highlight the nature and type of employment available to newly qualified teachers.
22. It would be important for the Department of Education to consider ways of attracting more males into post-primary teaching. Without affirmative action, the number of males entering the teaching profession may continue to decline.
23. Affirmative action is required to ensure that students on teacher education courses in Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged. In addition to the financial incentives currently available to students on initial teacher courses in England and Wales, their teaching placements may be organised in schools in Northern Ireland.

METHODOLOGY

24. A primary objective in designing the research was to generate data from as many perspectives as possible using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative instruments used included two questionnaire surveys. The first involved a postal questionnaire survey to school principals in all 235 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland. Designed to capture data in relation to their experience and perception of recruitment difficulties, the principal questionnaire covered five aspects:
 - ◆ the difficulties encountered in recruiting staff by subject;
 - ◆ the impact of recruitment difficulties on curriculum planning, the range of subjects taught and the range of activities taught;

- ◆ the strategies used to address recruitment difficulties;
 - ◆ predicted changes in staffing levels;
 - ◆ the use of temporary contracts.
25. A total of 136 (58%) of the 235 post-primary school principals surveyed completed and returned a questionnaire. An examination of the responses shows that a minimum of 48% of the questionnaires were completed by principals in each of the five Education and Library Boards, in Grammar and Non-grammar schools, and in Controlled, Maintained, Voluntary and Integrated schools.
26. The second questionnaire was sent with the first to all Heads of Department (HOD) in each of the 235 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland to explore a range of issues pertaining to recruitment patterns in subject areas. A total of 161 (69%) post-primary schools returned completed questionnaires. Examination of these returns revealed that 25 failed to include a principal questionnaire, 4 included a principal but not a HOD questionnaire and 132 schools returned both questionnaires.

Qualitative data collection

27. School-based interviews were conducted with ten school principals, six vice principals, sixteen HODs and six career teachers from thirteen schools. The purpose of the interviews was to gather further insights to complement and extend the data provided from the questionnaire surveys, in relation to current and predicted teacher recruitment issues. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, with each discussion audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed using the grounded method of qualitative analysis.
28. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with six lecturers from the five main teacher education institutions in Northern Ireland. Topics of discussion were DE quotas, any trends in the numbers of applicants

and entrants on to courses, any trends by subject and any gender differential noted.

Secondary Data Analysis

29. An approach was made to the four main institutions currently offering full-time initial teacher education courses in Northern Ireland, to obtain detailed information regarding recruitment patterns. In particular information was acquired, dating back to 1997, concerning the number of applicants to courses, number of places available, DE quotas and any recruitment difficulties by subject. Statistics were also gathered for GCSE and A level entries over the same period of time for analysis.

THE PROJECT

30. The research project was carried out for the Department of Education by Stranmillis University College: A College of Queen's University Belfast. The cost of the project was £15,500.

FULL REPORT

31. The full report, entitled "The Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Post-Primary Schools in Northern Ireland" by Colette Gray, Irene Bell, Brian Cummins, Patricia Eaton, Julian Greenwood, John McCullagh and Sarah Behan is available on the Department of Education website at www.deni.gov.uk/index/32-statisticsandresearch_pg.htm

This paper is a summary of the research report and as such any views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Education.

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