

DfE Teachers Working Longer Review Interim Report

The Department for Education (DfE) has published the *Interim Report of the Teachers Working Longer Review* (TWLR), after a delay of nearly a year after it was signed off by the TWLR Steering Committee in February 2016. The Interim Report is available via www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-working-longer-review-interim-report. The reasons given by the DfE for the delay in publication include local election purdah and then EU Referendum purdah. It has now become clear that the delay in publication was because the Government wanted to release the Interim Report as part of a suite of materials alongside the 2016 Teacher Workload Survey, including as a document providing a commentary on aspects of the crisis of recruitment and retention within the teaching profession.

The NASUWT's Response

For the NASUWT, the DfE TWLR has never been about teachers working longer and the NASUWT does not accept the increase in the retirement age brought about by the Government's reform to teachers' pensions. The NASUWT is the only teachers' union which is in dispute over the Government's pension age.

The DfE TWLR Interim Report does shed a light on the treatment of older teachers by employers, however, and outlines how this has exacerbated the crisis of teacher retention.

The Interim Report is not the Final Report of the TWLR and only draws interim conclusions, including that there are gaps in the evidence available, in particular on the impact of ageing on the teaching profession. However, the report does point to widespread poor management of teachers by schools during the whole of their careers, which leads to teachers leaving the profession well before their current normal pension age.

Older teachers suffer from the excessive workload, inadequate pay and de-professionalisation from which all teachers suffer. However, the specific pressures on older workers, including those involving carer responsibilities for parents, children and grandchildren, drive teachers out of the labour market. Schools are frequently unresponsive, uncaring employers, which do not seek to manage their staff effectively or retain them in the teaching profession through the adoption of practices such as flexible working. This drives older teachers out of the profession, as well as teachers at other points in their lives – for example, teachers returning from maternity leave.

Added to this, older teachers often face specific instances of age discrimination which drive them out of employment. The current system fails older teachers, and unless there are significant improvements in working practices at school level, it will continue to do so.

The Interim Report vindicates the NASUWT's national action on workload, the Union's campaign to secure flexible working opportunities for women teachers, and also the Union's campaigning and casework opposing age discrimination.

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Key findings of the Interim Report, as summarised by the NASUWT, are:

- teachers' capabilities to carry out the highly demanding role of teaching do not decrease as teachers age;
- despite the pressure and stress which teachers face, teachers' sickness absence is lower than that of other professional workers;
- teachers are not offered high-quality occupational health support;
- the only changed career pathways open to classroom teachers are supply teaching or promotion to management. School leaders have more options available, which includes flexible working;
- effective management would enable teachers to work for longer;
- lack of work/life balance drives older as well as younger teachers out of the profession;
- despite the Equality Act 2010 outlawing discrimination on grounds of disability, many teachers leave the profession because of health-related reasons;
- the culture of hostility in many schools towards older workers drives teachers out of the profession.

Extracts from the Report are in italics below, with the NASUWT's summary headings above these and NASUWT comments below:

- **Teachers' capabilities to carry out the highly demanding role of teaching do not decrease as teachers age.**

'Evidence suggests that the key cognitive skills needed for teaching do not deteriorate significantly before age 70, and age is not necessarily a key indicator of a teacher's ability to teach. Furthermore, that the age of teachers does not have a noticeable effect on student performance and therefore older teachers continue to play an equal part in improving student outcomes, with there being no evidence of a negative impact as a result of ageing.'

The NASUWT says:

Despite this, NASUWT research, which has been presented as detailed evidence to the TWLR, reveals the age discrimination from which older teachers suffer, often because they are resented by younger, less experienced managers.

- **Despite the pressure and stress which teachers face, teachers' sickness absence is lower than that of other professional workers.**

'The teaching profession appears to have a lower rate of sickness absence than other professional workers, though this levels out from age 55 upwards with levels being similar to other professionals at that stage.'

The NASUWT says:

Despite this, NASUWT research has revealed that many employers adopt punitive and discriminatory approaches to teacher-sickness management, which seek to dismiss teachers as quickly as possible once they become ill, even if they are ill for short periods of time or because of a disability.

- **Teachers are not offered high-quality occupational health support**

'The evidence in relation to occupational health (OH) provision in the teaching profession suggests that the level of service available to support teachers, and the extent to which it is used, varies significantly. ... evidence points to it often being the case that interventions do not take place until the point that the teacher's illness has developed significantly and ill-health retirement is being considered.'

The NASUWT says:

Teachers who become ill often never access occupational health support, or may only see an occupational health physician at the point of dismissal. In its response to the current Green Paper on employment and health, the NASUWT has called for an entitlement for the whole schools workforce to access occupational health support which is genuinely independent and for occupational health provision to meet a set of agreed, high-quality standards.

- **The only changed career pathways open to classroom teachers are supply teaching or promotion to management. School leaders have more options available, which includes flexible working.**

'Evidence on career pathways available to teachers shows that members of the leadership team are more likely to have access to a wider range of options when considering changes in career pathway than classroom teachers. For the latter, it would appear that the only two readily available options are promotion through the management chain and undertaking supply teaching. In contrast, teachers in the senior leadership team may have access to other options, which include working as local authority advisors, working across a number of schools in multi academy trusts or school federations, job sharing and co-headships. There is no evidence, however, of any difference in the options that are available to older and younger teachers, or of options that are used specifically to assist working longer.'

'From the limited evidence that is available on the use of flexible working it is clear that the opportunity to do so varies enormously from school to school. The reasons cited include cultural issues in schools, school managers' attitude to the use of flexibilities and practical difficulties such as timetabling.'

The NASUWT says:

Government reforms since 2010 have removed the career pathways which would motivate and retain classroom teachers. Leaving permanent teaching employment, or leaving the classroom, are the only options available to teachers. The Government must restore classroom teacher career pathways if it is to successfully address the teacher retention crisis.

One of the most significant drivers of teachers out of the profession is refusal to allow flexible working following maternity leave or because of carer responsibilities (including caring for elderly relatives). As social care provision for the vulnerable has been withdrawn because of austerity, the burden of caring has fallen more and more on women, including older women who frequently care for several generations at once – grandchildren, children and elderly relatives. This is particularly significant because 75% of teachers are women. If schools want to retain teachers during the whole of their careers, there must be a culture change in attitudes to flexible working.

- **Effective management would enable teachers to work for longer.**

'Evidence suggests that supportive management practices, whereby there is a positive attitude/culture towards the value and managing the well-being of older teachers, and the use of alternative career pathways and flexible working, would all help to motivate teachers to work for longer. Feeling valued, having autonomy and support for well-being are cited as major factors which can motivate teachers to work longer, so management practices which support teachers and give them control over their work are key factors here.'

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The NASUWT says:

These are not solely factors which motivate and retain older teachers – providing supportive management and also giving teachers agency and professional autonomy will help to retain teachers of all ages in the profession, including the thousands of teachers who leave the profession within five years of qualifying.

- **Lack of work/life balance drives older as well as younger teachers out of the profession.**
- **Despite the Equality Act 2010 outlawing discrimination on grounds of disability, many teachers leave the profession because of health-related reasons.**

'Teachers themselves cite health and then workload as the two most likely reasons why they may leave the profession early. Here work-life balance concerns are seen as a significant issue during mid and late career phases in particular.'

The NASUWT says:

It unfortunately comes as no surprise to the NASUWT that workload and health issues are driving older teachers out of the profession. NASUWT research confirms that older teachers have toxic levels of workload and stress imposed upon them – punitive pupil marking and assessment regimes and school inspection regimes are often focused on older, more experienced, teachers.

The NASUWT is extremely concerned about increasingly punitive sickness management policies which put teachers on the fast track to dismissal when they have a short time off work because of illness. This includes when teachers are off work because of a disability and it can amount to unlawful discrimination for a school to behave in this way. Because of this, teachers can often leave the profession for health reasons because of an unsupportive employer, not because they have become too ill to teach.

Schools should reduce workload for all teachers and make reasonable, supportive adjustments to enable disabled teachers, and teachers in poor health, to remain in work for as long as they wish.

- **The culture of hostility in many schools towards older workers drives teachers out of the profession.**

'Failure to feel supported by management and the culture within the school/establishment towards older teachers and flexible working, are also cited as key factors in some older workers leaving the profession.'

'Local practices, culture, and school leaders' perception of the value of older/experienced teachers appear to be key factors in enabling working longer. Changing attitudes and promoting best practice are essential if there is to be a consistent and comprehensive solution/approach.'

The NASUWT says:

The NASUWT has argued since 2010 for a culture change in schools, so that all teachers are valued for their experience, and older teachers particularly so. The TWLR Interim Report amounts to a condemnation of schools which see teachers as disposable commodities which can be easily replaced – this culture bears heavy responsibility for the current teacher-shortage crisis.

