



THE BIG QUESTION 2017

An opinion survey of teachers and school leaders

Introduction

The Big Question 2017, carried out in February and March 2017, is the seventh annual national survey of teachers and headteachers conducted by the NASUWT.

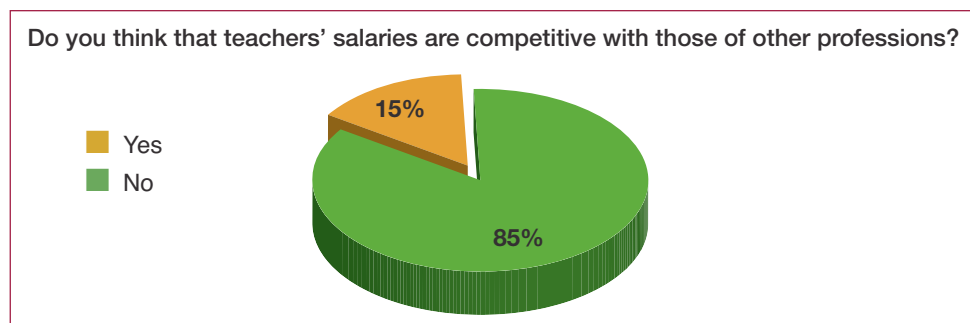
Over 900 teachers in Northern Ireland responded to the survey.

The Big Question 2017 highlights the views of teachers and school leaders on a range of subjects including pay, pupil behaviour, empowerment and professionalism, work/life balance, and mental and physical wellbeing.

The Big Question time series offers the only nationally available data set to track trends in teachers' and school leaders' opinions over time, demonstrating the developing views of teachers and school leaders and the issues impacting on their work.

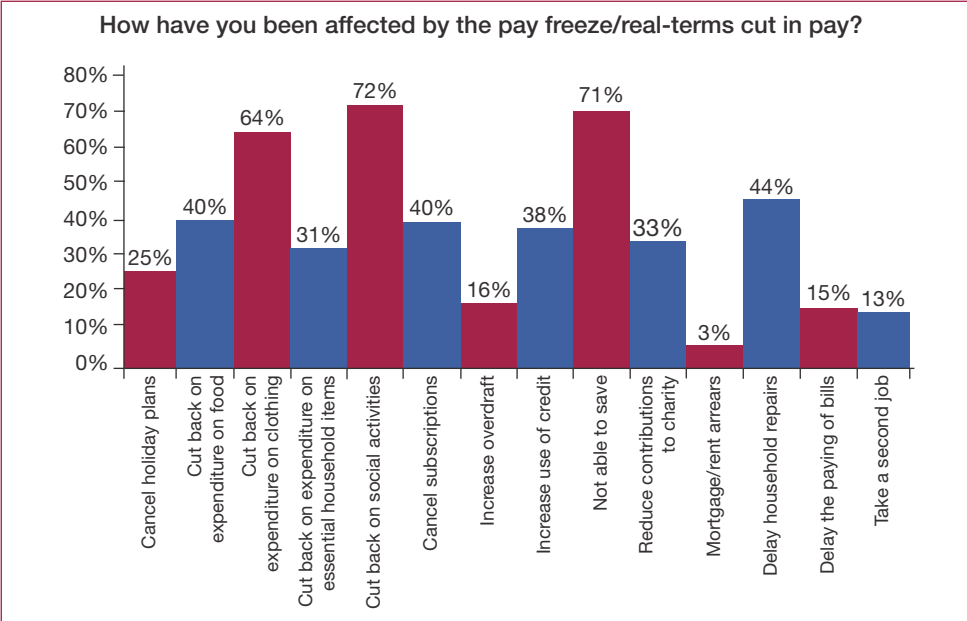
Pay and Cost of Living

Over four fifths (85%) of teachers do not believe that teachers' salaries are competitive when compared with those of other professions, an increase of 11% since 2011. Over two thirds (71%) believe that people are put off teaching because of levels of pay.



When asked about the impact of the cost of living crisis on their spending in the last year, the survey revealed that:

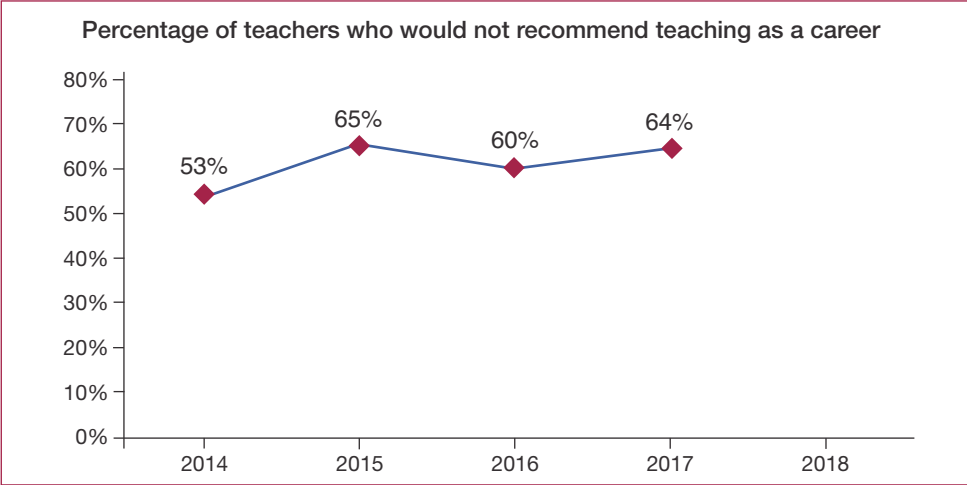
- almost two thirds (64%) of teachers had to cut back on spending on clothing;
- two fifths (40%) had to cut back on expenditure on food;
- almost a third (31%) had to cut back on essential household items;
- over a third (38%) had to increase the use of credit;
- 16% had to extend their overdrafts; and
- 15% had to delay the paying of bills.



Over four fifths of teachers (85%) believe that they are not paid at a level that is commensurate to their skills and experience and over three fifths (63%) have not received the pay progression to which they are entitled.

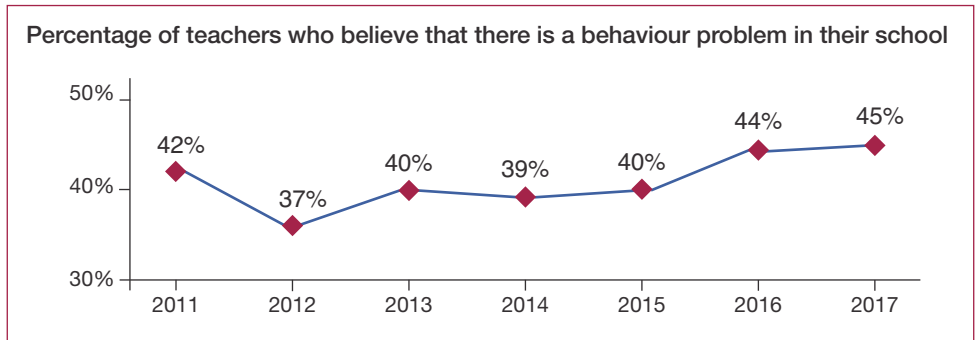
Over two fifths (42%) of teachers are not paid for the full range of responsibilities they undertake.

Sixty-four per cent of teachers would not recommend teaching as a career.



Pupil Behaviour

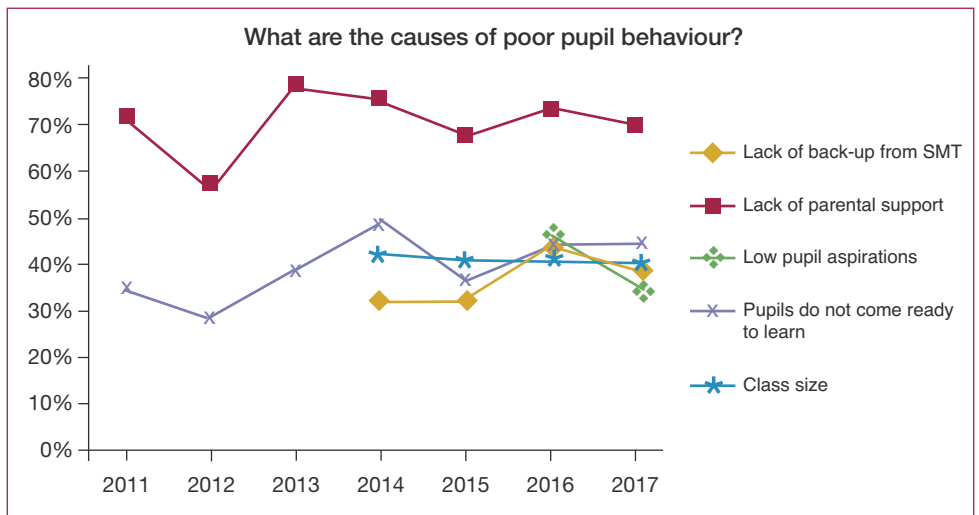
Over three quarters (78%) of teachers said that they think there is a widespread behaviour problem in schools today and over two fifths (45%) said they believe there is a behaviour problem in their particular school.



More than four fifths (84%) of teachers said that there is an issue of low-level disruption amongst the pupils they teach.

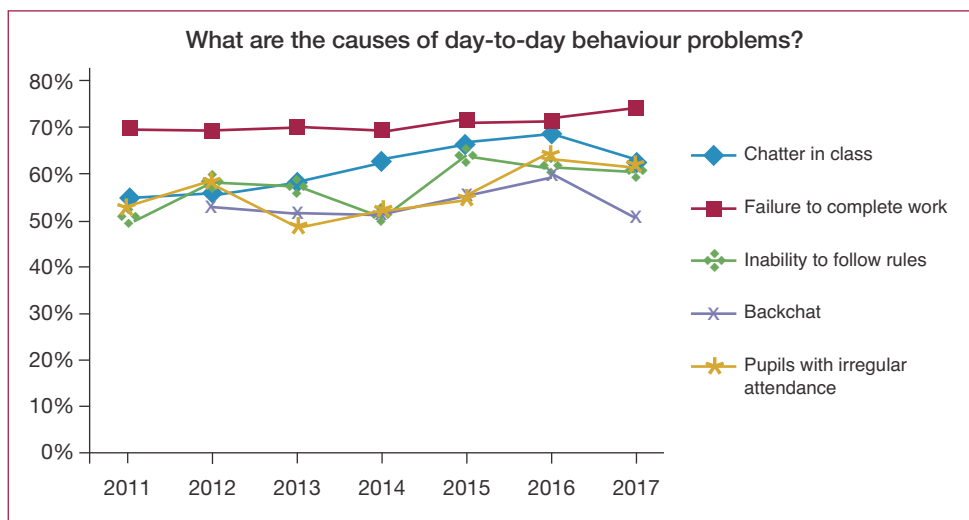
When examining the causes of poor pupil behaviour, the top five causes that teachers identified were lack of parental support (70%), pupils not ready to learn (43%), low aspirations (38%), class size (42%) and lack of back-up from the senior management team (39%).

The issues of lack of parental support and pupil readiness have been a feature since 2011.



Over two fifths of teachers (41%) said that they were not given the appropriate training to deal with poor pupil behaviour, 36% said that they were not given the appropriate advice and information to deal with poor pupil behaviour and 40% said that they needed additional powers. A fifth of teachers stated that curriculum and assessment policies in their school had contributed to poor behaviour.

The top five causes of day-to-day behaviour problems that were cited by teachers were chatter in class (62%), failure to complete work (74%), inability to follow rules (61%), backchat (51%) and pupils with irregular attendance (61%). All of the causes have appeared regularly in the top five since the first Big Question in 2012.



When asked to identify the types of low-level disruption experienced, the top three issues for teachers were pupils:

- talking or chatting out of turn (90%);
- not following instructions (80%); and
- being slow to start work (77%).

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they were subject to various forms of abuse and bullying behaviour by pupils and parents in the last year. Almost half of all teachers (47%) stated that they were subject in the last year to verbal abuse by pupils and 11% were subject to threats of physical assault by pupils. Five per cent of teachers said that they were threatened

and abused on social networks by pupils and 11% said that they were physically assaulted by pupils.

A quarter of all teachers (25%) stated that they were subject in the last year to verbal abuse by parents and 11% were subject to threats of physical assault by parents. Three per cent of teachers said that they were threatened and abused on social networking sites by parents.

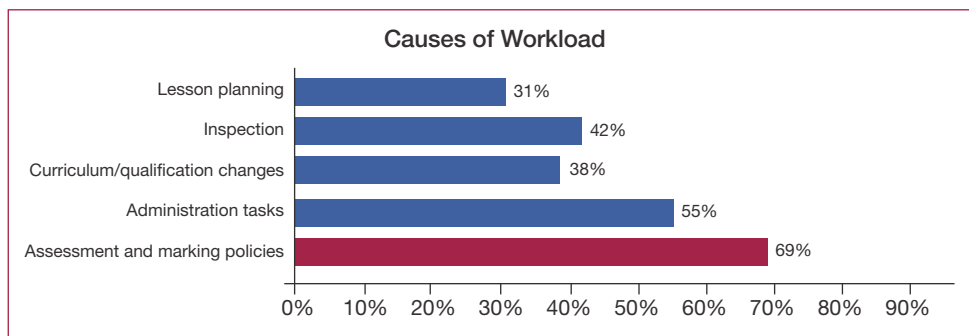
Almost two fifths of teachers (39%) said that they do not feel supported by senior management teams when dealing with issues of pupil indiscipline.

Workload and Bureaucracy

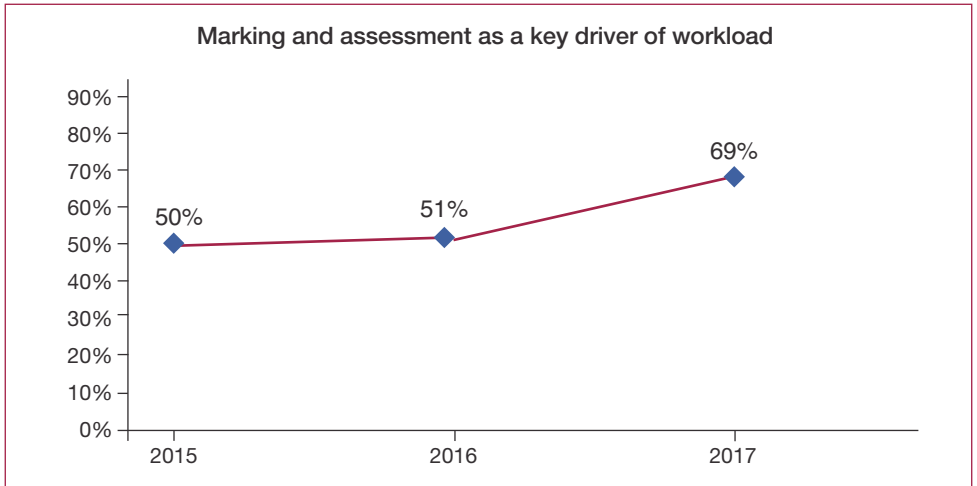
Teacher assessment systems, and the processes associated with recording pupil data, are now a massive workload burden, with inspection also continuing to be a workload burden.

When asked about their key concerns about their job, more than four fifths of teachers (87%) cited workload as their number-one issue.

In order to determine the drivers of workload, teachers were asked about the causes of workload in schools. The top five causes cited were assessment and marking policies (69%), administration tasks (55%), inspection (42%), curriculum and qualification changes (38%), and lesson planning (31%).



For the 69% who cited assessment and marking policies as a key generator of excessive workload, this is a rise of 19% since 2015 when it first appeared as a major issue.



Empowerment and Professionalism

Teachers continue to feel disempowered, with concern being expressed about a lack of respect for teachers and unreasonable expectations being placed upon them.

Fifty-five per cent of teachers stated that they believe they are not empowered as a teacher.

When asked to identify the factors that lead to disempowerment, the top five factors identified were constant change (69%), a culture of blame or criticism (55%), a lack of respect for teachers' professional judgement (63%), a lack of understanding of the nature of their job from decision makers (61%), and that teachers' views are not listened to (50%). The top three reasons have been cited by teachers since 2011.

When asked a series of questions about their perceptions of their role, concerns were expressed about the nature of the work they are being asked to undertake and the impact it has on their sense of self, professionally.

Over a third of teachers (46%) said that they did not feel they had control over their work, a fifth said that they did not feel trusted to do the job and almost a third (29%) felt that they were not given the freedom to teach.

Furthermore, almost two thirds of teachers (64%) felt constantly evaluated and judged and over half (54%) felt that they were held responsible for problems that they had no control over. It is unsurprising, therefore, that almost half of teachers (45%) stated that they do not look forward to going to work.

Seven per cent of teachers have been threatened with capability procedures in the last year and 3% have been subject to capability procedures. Eight per cent of teachers have either been offered or have been put on support programmes.

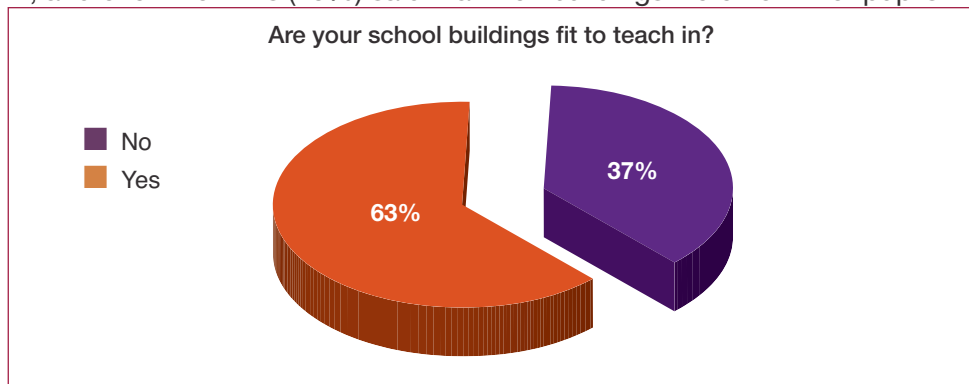
Five per cent of teachers have been threatened with capability procedures in the last year and 2% have been subject to capability procedures. Two per cent of teachers have either been offered or have been put on support programmes.

Over half (56%) of teachers said that they have not accessed continuing professional development (CPD) in the last 12 months. More than four fifths of teachers (84%) said that all teachers should have a contractual entitlement to CPD in working time.

Buildings and Resources

Teachers remain concerned about the nature and quality of the resources that they have available to them.

Over a third of teachers (37%) stated that their buildings were not fit to teach in, and over two fifths (43%) said that their buildings were not fit for pupils.



Over two fifths of teachers (45%) said that they are not provided with the resources to allow them to teach and over two fifths of the teachers (44%) surveyed said that they did not have high-quality ICT provision to allow for appropriate use of the technology.

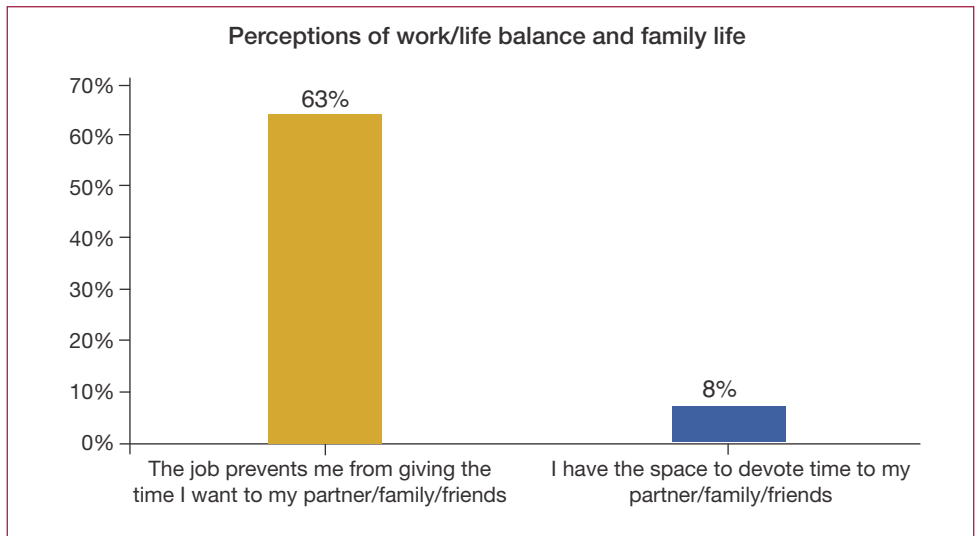
Work/Life Balance

For the first time, the Big Question survey asked a series of questions about teachers' perceptions about their work/life balance and the impact of workload on their family life.

The vast majority of teachers (85%) stated that they frequently worried about work problems when not at work, and only 12% stated that they were able to relax at home.

Almost three quarters of teachers (74%) said that they felt too tired to enjoy doing the things they like to do and only 10% said they had enough time and energy for hobbies.

Additionally, the job had an impact on their families, as almost two thirds of teachers (63%) said that their job prevents them from giving the time they want to their partner, family or friends. Five per cent of teachers said that the impact of their job had led to a relationship breakdown.

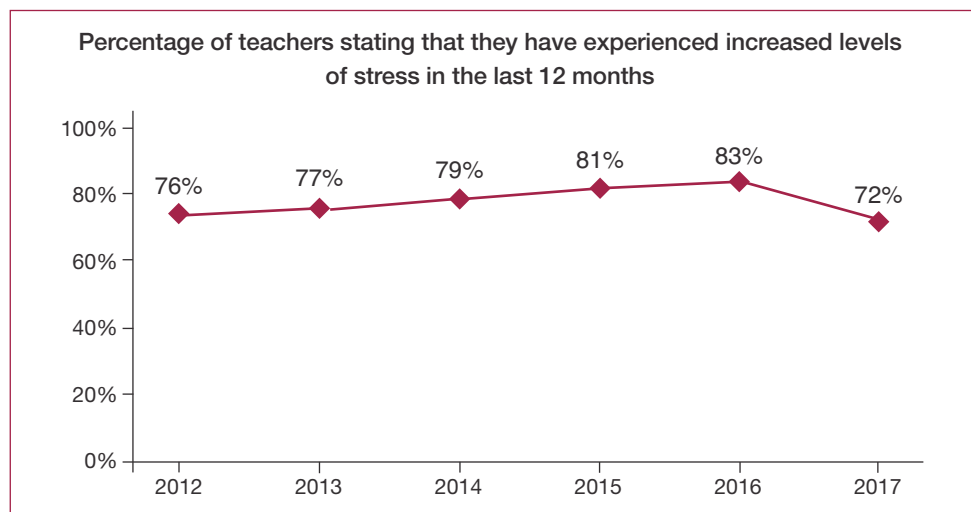


Some teachers expressed concern that work/life balance was impeding the quality of their work as more than a quarter (27%) said that they are often too worn down to give the job their best effort. This has in turn led to serious dissatisfaction with the recognition they receive for the time they give, as over four fifths of teachers (86%) said they work too hard for too little reward.

Health and Wellbeing

When teachers were asked about how their school views their wellbeing, over three fifths (63%) reported that their wellbeing is not considered important by the school and over four fifths (84%) said that their job has impacted negatively on their wellbeing.

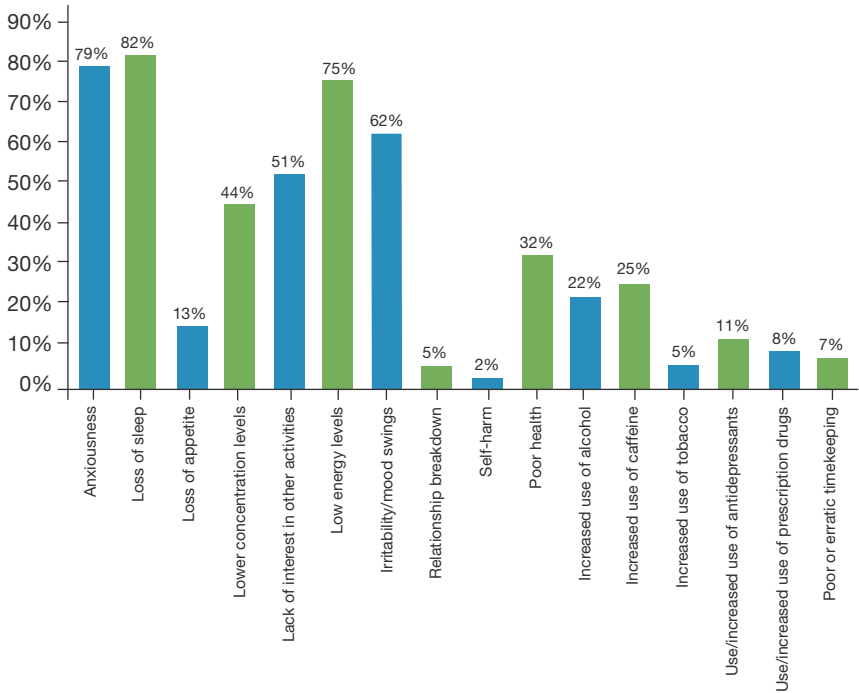
Almost three quarters of teachers (72%) stated that they have experienced more workplace stress in the last 12 months, and whilst this is lower than previous years, this is following a number of years in which teachers have also recorded increased levels of stress for each year, cumulatively.



More than three fifths (61%) of teachers stated that the job had adversely affected their mental health in the last 12 months, and half said that the job had adversely affected their physical health. Furthermore, teachers reported a range of negative mental/physical problems as a result of work, including: loss of sleep (82%), anxiousness (79%), low energy levels (75%) and irritability/mood swings (62%). More than one in ten teachers (11%) stated that they had started using antidepressants in the past 12 months. Two per cent of teachers said that they had self-harmed in the past year.

Consequently, where the job had affected teachers' physical and mental health in the last 12 months, more than two fifths (45%) had seen a doctor and over a third (33%) had been forced to take medication. More than one in ten (11%) had undergone counselling and 3% had been admitted to hospital.

In the last 12 months, have you experienced any of the following because of work?



Respect and Job Satisfaction

Teachers feel that they are not respected by their school management and over half of teachers do not feel valued.

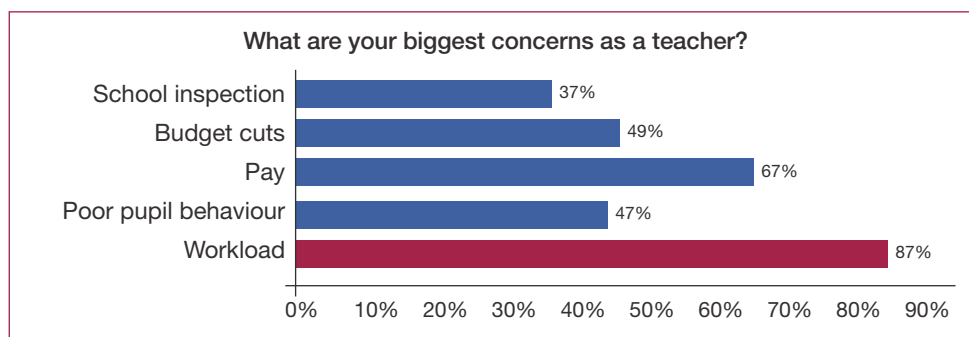
Over a third of teachers (35%) said that they do not feel respected as professionals and a similar number (32%) said that they do not believe their classroom expertise is valued.

Over half of teachers (55%) stated that they believe their opinions are not valued by school management. Almost a third (31%) of teachers said their work is not valued by parents and more than two fifths (43%) said that they believe their work is not valued by school management.

Teachers were asked what they like most about their jobs. The responses are similar to those identified over the last four years – namely, interacting with pupils (90%), seeing young children progress (88%), teaching (88%), making a positive difference (75%), and support from colleagues (41%).

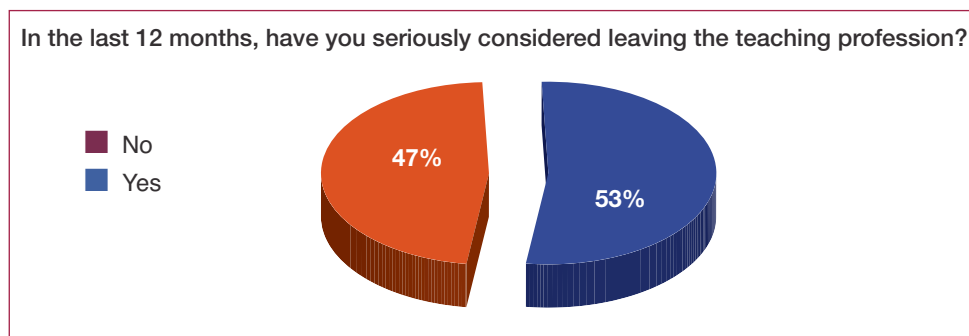
Over a third of teachers (37%) stated that they are currently dissatisfied with their job, an increase of 8% from 2011. Over half (55%) said that their job satisfaction has declined in the last 12 months.

When asked what their key concerns were, teachers identified that workload was once more the key concern; this was highlighted by 87%, 13% higher than in 2011. The other concerns identified in the top five were poor pupil behaviour (47%), pay (67%), budget cuts (49%) and school inspection (37%). The picture in comparison to 2011 has worsened, although most of the issues remain the same.



It is unsurprising, given the results of the survey, that 45% of teachers stated that they do not look forward to going to work at all.

Almost three fifths of teachers are seriously considering leaving their job (58%), and over half (53%) are thinking of quitting the profession altogether.



Further Research and Surveys

The NASUWT is committed to undertaking a Big Question survey annually. This complements other members' surveys.

NASUWT-commissioned research and survey reports are available for download at www.nasuwt.org.uk.



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