# Concerns over staffing and pay lead teachers to consider strike action



A recent survey conducted among members of the National Education Union (NEU) has revealed significant concerns regarding staffing levels and working conditions within state schools in England. The findings, based on responses from over 14,100 teachers, were published on the first day of the NEU's annual conference in Harrogate, North Yorkshire.

The survey indicated that nearly half of the teachers, accounting for 48%, reported an increase in the number of teaching positions that are either unfilled or temporarily filled over the past year. This situation has contributed to heightened levels of stress and workload among educators, with 71% of respondents noting a rise in staff absences due to sickness.

An alarming 56% of teachers stated that the rate of staff departures from their workplaces has worsened, highlighting a growing crisis in recruitment and retention within the profession. The impact of this staffing crisis is reflected in teachers' experiences of workload pressure; more than three-quarters of those surveyed (75%) expressed that they often struggle to disengage from work-related thoughts when at home.

In the context of these troubling trends, the NEU held an indicative ballot regarding the government’s proposed 2.8% pay increase for the upcoming academic year. According to the preliminary electronic ballot results, a striking 93.7% of participating members rejected the pay offer, and 83.4% indicated a willingness to engage in strike action to advocate for a higher, fully-funded pay award.

The NEU’s national executive is expected to convene during the conference to deliberate on the ballot outcome. There is potential for an emergency motion regarding pay to be presented, which could lead to a formal strike ballot.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the NEU, addressed the survey findings, asserting that the current working culture is encroaching upon teachers' personal lives. He pointed to government statistics revealing unsustainable working hours, arguing that prolonged recruitment and retention issues exacerbate existing challenges. Kebede called for a "major pay correction" to not only attract new talent but also to retain existing staff.

Teachers reported feeling overwhelmed, with many working through evenings and weekends. Approximately 62% reported working during school holidays, and a mere 9% felt they could take a complete break from their duties during this time. One educator shared their experience, stating, "You feel exhausted all the time and guilty for sacrificing your own family time," highlighting the mental toll of the demanding profession.

In response to the NEU's concerns, a spokesperson from the Department for Education acknowledged the importance of school staff in enhancing students' life chances. The department emphasised its commitment to making teaching an attractive profession and outlined efforts to alleviate workload pressures. They noted the recent 5.5% pay increase and plans to recruit an additional 6,500 expert teachers, alongside an investment of £233 million allocated for the following year aimed at enriching classroom standards.

As teachers and union representatives gather for discussions at the NEU conference, the outcomes of these deliberations may significantly influence the future landscape of education in England, particularly in light of staffing and pay challenges presently facing the profession.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/120659/pdf/> - This link corroborates concerns about teacher recruitment and retention, highlighting issues such as pay, pay structure, workload, and accountability regimes. It supports the NEU's evidence on these matters impacting teacher job satisfaction and retention.
2. <https://www.learninghive.co.uk/blog/education-staff-workload-wellbeing-and-retention> - This article provides insights into the workload and wellbeing of education staff, echoing NEU survey findings that highlight increased workload and decreased job satisfaction among teachers.
3. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/private-school-teachers-taking-second-jobs-make-ends-meet-neu-survey> - This link indicates the financial struggles faced by teachers, shown by the significant number taking on second jobs, which aligns with concerns over pay levels and working conditions raised in the NEU survey.
4. <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-03/NEU%20-%20Teachers%20Pay%20and%20Progression%20for%20September%202022%20-%20Final.pdf> - This document outlines NEU’s stance on teacher pay and progression, supporting the claim of NEU members rejecting low pay offers and seeking better pay conditions.
5. <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/> - This link provides access to education statistics that could support data on staffing levels and other educational metrics mentioned in the article.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-workforce-in-england> - This webpage offers guidance and data related to the school workforce in England, potentially corroborating trends in staffing shortages and challenges in teacher retention.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/business/nearly-half-of-teachers-say-number-of-unfilled-positions-has-worsened-poll-b2732631.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data