

Teacher Shortages : What Makes Some Teachers More in Demand than Others?

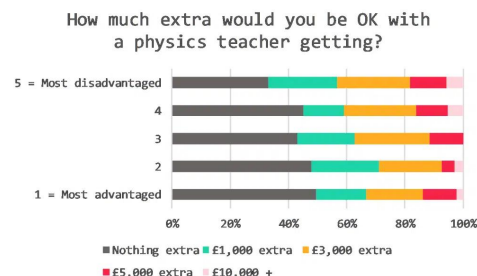


The national shortage of teachers in the UK is a serious problem, and with the number of secondary school students set to rise by [15% by 2027](#), it could only get worse unless policy makers take action. The number of primary school pupils will fall slightly by the same date as the effect of the baby boom in the early 2000s starts to level off. But there is a significant shortage of the number of teachers in certain specialisms. What makes some teachers more in demand than others?

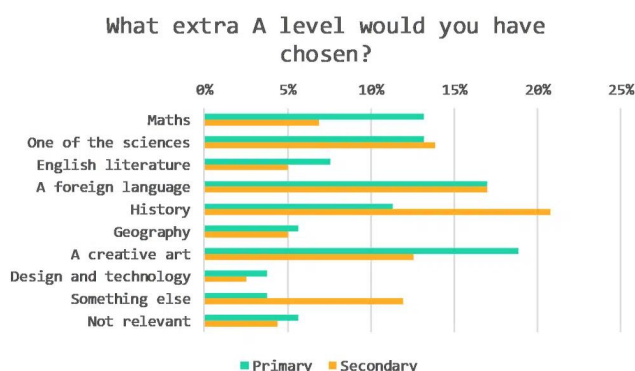
Subject Specialism

Recruitment targets for teachers of specialist subject areas such as RE, modern languages and science are repeatedly missed. The shortage of teachers in certain subject specialisms is primarily an issue in high schools, but it has a knock-on effect on primary schools. Physics and maths teachers are in particularly high demand by school leaders. According to [The Independent](#), 50 per cent of teachers of maths and physics quit within five years. The shortage of teachers in these subjects tends to be worse in disadvantaged and rural areas,

where schools struggle to attract the top talent. Pupils studying key stage 5 maths at the most disadvantaged schools are [almost twice as likely](#) to be taught by an inexperienced teacher as their counterparts in wealthier areas. Thus, the teaching shortage is exacerbating inequality. Perhaps surprisingly, many teachers of other subjects would be happy to see science teachers receive a cash incentive if it would improve the situation. In a recent Teacher Tapp survey, around half of those polled said they would be okay with a physics teacher receiving a cash bonus. There was little difference in the responses given by those working in a struggling



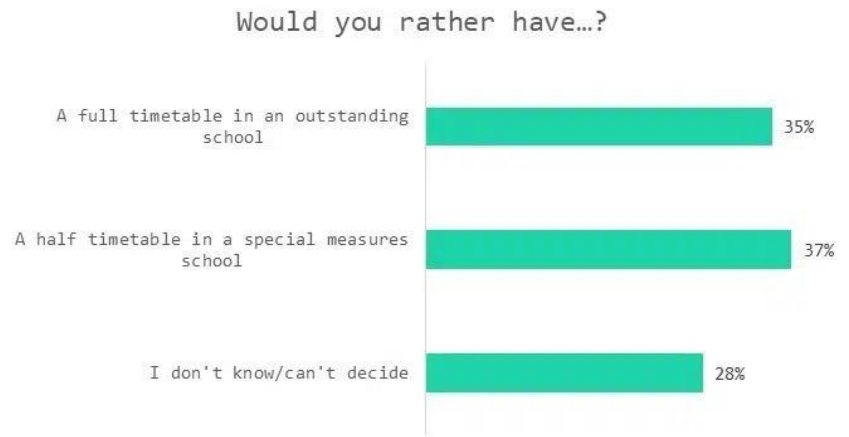
Extra teacher training could be another way to address the issue of teacher shortages in certain subjects. When asked which A-level they wished they had taken at school, the second



Since 2014, it has been mandatory for all primary schools in England to teach a modern or ancient foreign language. Yet according to the [British Council](#), "languages remain a marginal subject which many primary schools find challenging to deliver." Could the government find a way to harness the latent language ambitions of teachers by funding training? school and those teaching in the most advantaged schools.

Willingness to Work in Challenging Settings

Teachers who are willing to work in schools that are deemed less desirable will always be in high demand. Inner-city, rural and special measures schools habitually struggle to attract the number and standard of teachers they need. Teachers with the highest qualifications and experience have their pick of the best schools, but few choose to work in an isolated rural location or a low-income, high-poverty school where their performance will be continually under scrutiny and staff morale is likely to be low. However, 37% of Teacher Tappers said that they would prefer to work in a special measures school over an outstanding one if their most popular response was a foreign language.



This suggests that for many school teachers, an increase in non-teaching and professional development time would compensate for the high workload and challenging behaviour that is likely to be par and course of working in a struggling school.

What Is Being Done to Solve Teacher Shortages?

The government is currently trialling a new [early career bonus scheme](#) aimed at increasing retention rates in shortage subjects. New teachers of maths and physics will be offered a £2,000 bonus each year they remain in the profession. The bonus will only be paid to those in target geographical areas, which are predominantly in the North and North East of England. ~~timetabled hours were cut in half.~~ This cash incentive is in addition to the generous bursaries introduced in 2017, which boosted the amount available from £25,000 to £35,000. Data from recent Teacher Tapp surveys suggests that there could be other strategies the government could consider beyond awarding financial incentives. Additional training for experienced teachers who wish to develop skills in shortage subjects such as modern foreign languages could help primary schools who are struggling to meet the requirements introduced in 2014. Reducing teaching timetables for those willing to work in struggling schools could attract higher numbers of experienced and qualified teachers. One thing is clear – further research is needed to identify strategies that could boost retention across the education system beyond a focus on what teachers make for a living.

Do you teach a shortage subject? What would encourage you to remain in teaching?

[Download the Teacher Tapp app](#) and have your say.