

**EMBARGO: 0030 hours**  
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### **Secondary education – the battle to teach**

Teachers are fighting a constant battle to be allowed to teach as a result of deteriorating pupil behaviour, says an independent study for the National Union of Teachers published today, Thursday 27 May, 2004.

The problem is compounded by lack of support from parents, says the report\* by Professors John MacBeath and Maurice Galton of Cambridge University.

In schools where behaviour problems are most acute, class size is of particular concern with blanket inclusion policies without adequate support and resourcing adding to the problems.

Dealing with difficult, disengaged or disruptive pupils takes up most of teachers' non-teaching time. Inclusion has aggravated the situation as schools feel reluctant to exclude pupils and simply displace problems into the community. Financial considerations are an added constraint.

In contrast, teachers' greatest job satisfaction comes from evidence of pupils' learning, when they saw the light and demonstrated their understanding of new ideas.

*'The buzz you get when that little light goes on and it could be an understanding or it could be a piece of work that you think twice, "Wow!" I think the biggest buzz I get is the learning. (AST English Teacher, 23 years' experience)*

Some Government initiatives, such as the Key Stage 3 strategy, are broadly welcomed. Some teachers, particularly those who entered teaching since the introduction of the National Curriculum, saw the Key Stage 3 strategy as a way of cutting down on lesson preparation whilst others welcomed the opportunity it presented to rethink their approach to teaching their subject.

Others initiatives such as statutory testing and inspection were generally disliked. The teachers said that curriculum overload, central prescription, imposed targets and high stakes testing work together to diminish opportunities for more spontaneous and creative teaching. There was a high level of consensus that there should be a halt to further innovation to give existing changes time to bed in.

So far the workforce agreement has had little impact on workload. Anticipation of the limit to teachers covering has led to an average reduction in cover to one period per week and to provide some clerical support for display, filing (in some cases) and in making appointments with parents.

Teachers' work takes between 45 and 70 hours per week. This includes between 1.5 to 2.0 hours at home every evening and at least 3 hours at the weekends. The workload increases as the teacher takes on more responsibility. Although all subject specialist teachers, typically, receive 4 or 5 periods a week of non-contact time, at least two will be taken up covering for absent colleagues. The remainder, supposedly available for preparation and marking, will often be used to deal with disciplinary issues, pupils' problems or administrative tasks.

While teachers in positions of middle management receive additional non-teaching periods these are not proportionate to the increased demands on their time. They have seen a disproportionate increase in their workload. In general, the greater the seniority the greater the increase in time spent working at home and after the school day ends.

Most of those interviewed said they would still have entered the teaching profession even under present-day conditions. Although few were thinking of leaving many claimed that they would be 'burnt out' long before their sixtieth birthday.

### **FACTORS THAT INHIBIT TEACHING**

Teachers were asked to list in rank order (Table A) the five most serious obstacles affecting their work. In one way or another the leading issues are reflections of government policy – an inter-related combination of too many national initiatives, over-loaded curriculum, assessment targets, inhibited by large class sizes and inadequate resources, of which poor pupil behaviour is a related outcome.

**Table A**  
**Teachers' ranking of obstacles to teaching**

	RANK	MISSING (or not in top 5 issues)
poor pupil behaviour	1	75
lack of time for discussion and reflection	2	104
large class sizes	3	127
too many national initiatives	4	114
over-loaded curriculum content in own subject	5	146
pressure to meet assessment targets	5	135
poor resources, materials and equipment	7	145
inclusion	8	156
lack of parental support	9	156
inadequate pay	10	173
preparation for appraisal/inspection	11	174
poorly maintained buildings	12	200
prescribed methods of teaching	13	198
limited professional opportunities	14	198
insufficient pastoral support	15	210

A very similar ranking was given by teachers whether they were heads of department, main scale teacher, or the responses were analysed by years of experience. Teachers with 25 years' plus experience, in common with teachers of less than five years' experience ranked poor pupil behaviour as the most serious obstacle to teaching.

*'a constant battle just to be allowed to teach'*  
Science Advanced Skills Teacher, 15 years' experience

Management, whilst also ranking poor pupil behaviour in pole position with class sizes second, differed markedly in citing lack of parental support in third place. For heads of department this issue was eighth and for main scale teachers tenth. This reflects the high level of contact of management with parents, who often shield teachers from parental complaints.

Teachers' frustrations arise from both the growth in the number of such incidents and from the increased administrative burden they impose. Most schools have systems of *assertive discipline* requiring students to be confronted with a written record of their behaviour and offered the opportunity to contest the teacher's or fellow pupil's account which again is recorded. In some schools there are different forms for different disciplinary offences with escalating 'punishments'. The more serious the offence and the attendant consequences the more staff will be involved in commenting and countersigning the form.

None of the obstacles to teaching and professional development has an independent existence. They are all closely inter-related and inter-dependent. While teachers' talk of poor pupil behaviour may be seen by some (including some policy makers and media critics) as simply blaming pupils, it is plainly evident that there is an intrinsic relationship of behaviour to class size, inappropriate curriculum, pressure to meet targets and keep up with new initiatives, and a consequent lack of time for professional sharing and reflection.

A Year 11 pupil commented:

*'Teacher's attitudes are changing because nothing seems to stay the same for long. It's like there's a lot less time for you because there's lots of changes in one term or half term, new teachers and teachers leaving, so that causes its own problems, discipline problems and learning because it is your relationship with the teacher that matters and you have to start building that all over again.'* (Girl, year 11)

Inclusion has added its own problems. There is a systemic relationship with neighbouring schools, selective policies, parental choice and performance tables. Schools willing to take those rejected elsewhere end up with a critical imbalance in their intake and pay the price for what is seen as an ethical decision.

*'Inclusion isn't inclusion in any meaningful sense of the term, because of many other schools in the area operate selective policies, yes and these are so-called comprehensive schools, we now see children we wouldn't have seen before. It makes it difficult to find help for children who really need help. There is an issue of expertise. Are we being really inclusive or simply preparing them to fail?'*  
(SEN teacher, 10 years' experience)

Parental support was widely seen as a matter of concern. It was most acutely felt in relation to pupil attitudes and behaviour. Parents were more likely to take umbrage, to support the pupils' version of events rather than side with the teachers, as would have been more common in the past.

*'They have no idea what life as a teacher is like or they think their child must always be right and you don't get back-up from the parents anymore. I think in the past, if a child got in trouble at school they would go home and get told off. Nowadays it's "Oh! What has the teacher done that is upsetting you?"'*  
(Head of science, 3 years' experience)

These comments which might easily be seen as 'anti-parent' need to be taken in a context of social change, the roots of which go deeper than individual parents' attitudes. If parents are less responsible for their children's behaviour, less inclined to visit the school or give reflex support to teachers it is because they too are under unprecedented pressures.

Families are not what they used to be in a hard statistical sense. The nuclear and extended family are becoming historical relics. But it is teachers “who bear the brunt”, “who are at the sharp end” – two of the metaphors among many which describe the impact ‘in here’ of the society ‘out there’.

*‘Parents do come in upset, angry, expressing a sense of injustice. If you take the time to listen, to be calm and hear them out they eventually confess that they are struggling with discipline. Their children are out of control. Their partners have left. They can’t pay the bills. They are fragile, volatile.’*

(English teacher, 10 years experience)

The survey asked teachers to comment on the impact of eight aspects of government policy. The National Curriculum, Key Stage 3 Strategy and individual pupil target setting were seen by a majority (65.2% and 64.4% and 61.1% respectively) as positive. External inspection and statutory testing were seen least positively (27.2% and 33.3% respectively). Opportunities for professional development is a more ambiguous finding in that it is seen most positively as an initiative to be welcomed but with its impact yet to be felt. Initial teacher training and mentoring is in a similar category, an initiative to which few could object but with effects still to be ascertained. The data in Table A that deserves further attention is the ‘no impact’ column which for initial teacher training/mentoring, performance management, statutory testing and professional development reveals between a quarter and a third of teachers claiming ‘no impact’.

**Table B: Response to government initiatives**

	Strong positive	Weak positive	Weak negative	Strong negative	no impact
National Curriculum	29.4	35.8	13.3	9.2	13.3
Statutory testing	6.0	21.2	27.6	17.1	28.1
External inspection	6.8	26.5	24.2	32.4	10.0
KS3 Strategies	27.4	37.0	16.9	8.2	10.5
Individual pupil target setting	20.4	40.7	17.7	7.7	13.6
Performance management	7.8	33.9	16.1	11.0	31.2
Opportunities for own professional development	21.2	45.5	5.9	2.3	25.2
Initial Teacher Training/ Mentoring	19.5	35.7	10.5	1.9	32.4

#### **JOB SATISFACTION AND THE STATUS OF TEACHING**

Despite the evident stress and pressures of the job every one of the interviewees when asked if, with hindsight, they would still have become a teacher, replied in the affirmative although in some cases with a degree of qualification.

*'I think I would. But I don't know. I've always wanted to do it so that's why. I got a good degree (1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours) and could have done other things but it's rewarding really although I think sometimes we as teachers put up with things my friends in business wouldn't - they'd switch and go to work for someone else.'*  
(History teacher, 3 years' experience)

Most interviewees also intended to remain in teaching although those who had been in the profession for a considerable period worried about whether they could last till retirement age.

*'I'm going on 55 now and I don't anticipate teaching until I'm 65. No way. I haven't got the energy. It takes far too much energy, zest, out of you.'*  
(Mathematics teacher, 33 years' experience)

Interviewees were unanimous as to what it was that gave them greatest satisfaction. In their different ways everyone said it was the pupils on a good day. Equally it was the pupils on a bad day coupled with the excessive paper work and lack of time *'to finish anything properly'* that constituted the less attractive side of the job.

*'Seeing the children respond. The response of a child has always been my kick and seeing that they have, in fact, got what I'm trying to put over to them. Not necessarily the results: it's their response in the classroom. If they're looking at me and I see the glint in their eye, click," yeah! I've got that" then it's brilliant.'*  
(Mathematics teacher, 33 years' experience)

These positive feelings had to be set against certain disadvantages such as the excessive paper work and the feeling that attitudes in society have changed in ways that make the job of teaching more difficult.

*'The amount of paper we get. Our desk is always full of stuff that needs putting away or chucking out. I do try to keep on top of it but no matter how hard I try there's always a pile.'* (Mathematics teacher, 33 years' experience)

*'That's the downside: how the child is changing. They don't recognise the value of the education. And class sizes are still quite large. The students know their rights but lack motivation. They're happy with a B when they could get an A. It's what's happening nationally and it's disappointing, no matter how much encouragement you give them.'* (AST science teacher, 15 years' experience)

Any positive feelings were undermined, to some extent, by the fact that few of those interviewed felt that the general public appreciated their work.

*'You always get stories like "Oh! I didn't like history at school" and "You get long holidays" that's always the thing. There's a perception that we don't work hard even if the say about holidays as a joke.'* (History teacher, 3 years experience)

*'I don't broadcast it (that I'm a teacher) I think the status of teaching has dropped. They see us as 9 to 4s who get lovely long holidays. "Oh! You're on holiday again Jim." My neighbour says and I reply, " Yeah! Yeah! I can't help it you know but I will go into work if you like only there's nobody there." That kind*

*of attitude is still there. It's an undervalued profession, both in remuneration and the way other people think about it.'* (Mathematics teacher with 33 years' experience)

Three comments written by teachers on their questionnaire forms have a poignant resonance:

*'I'm leaving the profession I love because I want my life back. It will break my heart to leave those kids but my family miss me!'* (Science KS3 Co-ordinator, 7 years' teaching experience)

*'I would be happy to give up teaching. It is dominating my term time non-school time. I achieve less in a classroom because the system is placing a stranglehold on all available time. And I'm a teacher marked Excellent in 2 recent Ofsted inspections who has been advised to train as an AST.'* (Economics teacher, 16 years' experience)

*' / taught through a period where we were respected as professionals and if asked we would do whatever was requested. Now heavy accountability has replaced this. I have excellent examination results, the pupils love my lessons and write to me after leaving describing what they ended up doing and thank me but I now hate the job and am considering leaving for a career in entomology.'* (Science teacher, 21 years' experience)

Perhaps the last word on this subject should be a suggestion from one interviewee:

*'I'd just like to see Tony Blair come in here and teach for six weeks. And him and Clarke actually are put in the situation that we're in. I know they too have stressful lives but if they had to come in and spend time in a school situation where you are trying to encourage students with all the difficulties and stresses-then they might see things differently.'* (Science AST, 15 years experience)

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**\*A life in secondary teaching** by Professor John MacBeath and Professor Maurice Galton of Cambridge University.

Research for the report was carried out through survey forms completed by 63 secondary schools and 230 teachers. The survey responses were followed up by 50 hours of taped interviews involving some 40 teachers and approximately 60 pupils. Schools represented urban, suburban and rural settings, the smallest having 500 pupils the largest over 1,500.

#### **School Sample compared to National Figures**

Two hundred and thirty three questionnaires were returned from sixty five schools, the largest response being ten from one school. The characteristics of the responding schools and teachers are highlighted below and compared to national statistics.

School Type	No. Schools (England)	% Schools (England)	No. Schools (Survey)	% Schools (Survey)	% Teachers (Survey)
Middle	294	8.5	4	6.2	3.6

Modern	130	3.8	4	6.2	8.0
Grammar	163	4.7	5	7.7	9.8
Comp	2823	82	46	70.1	72.9
Other	24	0.5	6	9	10
Total	3434		65		

*From Statistics of Education: Education and Training Statistics for the U.K. 2003 Edition*

### Geographical Region

	No. of teachers (England)	% of teachers (England)	No. of teachers (survey)	% of teachers (survey)
North East	11,380	5.6	11	4.8
North West	29,320	12.7	21	9.3
Yorkshire and The Humber	20,940	9.1	26	11.5
East Midlands	17,350	7.5	10	4.4
West Midlands	23,250	10.1	9	4.0
East of England	23,600	10.3	32	14.1
London	27,220	11.8	20	7.5
South East	30,740	13.4	71	31.3
South West	19,380	8.4	30	13.2
Total	203,170		230*	

*Schools workforce in England 2002 Edition*

*\* 3 responses had code scrubbed off*

### Years of Experience

No. Years	No. teachers thousands (England)	% teachers (England)	No. Years	No. teachers (survey)	% teachers (survey)
0-4	45.3	25	1-5	45	20.0
5-9	29.8	16	6-10	65	28.9
10-14	18.6	10	11-15	32	14.2
15-19	21.2	12	16-20	19	8.4
20+	66.6	37	21+	64	28.4
			Total	225	100.0
			Missing	8	
				233	

*Database of Teacher Records March 2002*