

Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) Briefing document
for elected representatives (TDs and Senators)



TACKLING THE TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION CRISIS IN SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOLS



**TUI represents 20,500 members
in Post Primary, Further Education
and Training and in Technological
Universities/Institutes of Technology.**

September 2025

Why is there a teacher recruitment and retention crisis in our schools?

Accommodation shortages and cost-of-living pressures have worsened an already-existing teacher recruitment and retention crisis in Irish second-level schools.

The crisis has its genesis in the unilateral 2011 Government imposition of differential pay scales, which saw those new to the profession being paid at a lower rate than longer-serving colleagues. While teacher unions vigorously and successfully campaigned until pay equality was ultimately restored, the era of pay discrimination had a hugely damaging effect on teacher morale and the attractiveness of the profession.

Also, where once teaching jobs of full hours upon initial appointment were the norm, in recent years we have seen a damaging drift towards an unacceptable culture of second-level teachers being offered contracts of less than full hours, forcing new entrants to the profession to survive on mere fragments of full-time jobs.

Worryingly, excessive teacher workload is leading to burnout in the profession, with many choosing to leave for other employments where they feel more valued, while clearly, the accommodation crisis and cost-of-living crisis are having a significant effect on teacher recruitment and retention, particularly in urban areas.

How does it affect schools and students?

Ultimately, students lose out most as a result of teacher recruitment and retention problems, with less access to the full range of subjects and situations where students can be taught by a succession of teachers.

Findings of a survey carried out in 111 schools by the Principals' and Deputy Principals' Association of the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI)¹ show that:

- 75% of schools advertised positions in the previous six months for which no teacher applied; 64% had unfilled vacancies due to recruitment and retention difficulties; 20% were forced to drop subjects
- 93% of schools experienced teacher recruitment difficulties in the previous six months; 58% of schools experienced teacher retention difficulties in the previous six months
- Just 3% believed that enough was being done at Government level to tackle the crisis; 84% believed more could be done to tackle bureaucratic/incremental credit barriers preventing Irish teachers living in other jurisdictions from returning home

¹ TUI Principals and Deputy Principals' Association survey, January 2025

In the same survey, the ten subjects most difficult to employ teachers in in ranked order were:

1. Maths
2. Irish
3. French
4. Construction Studies/Woodwork
5. Engineering/Metalwork
6. English
7. Biology
8. Home Economics
9. Chemistry
10. Art

Meanwhile, findings of a survey carried out among over 1,038 TUI members in April 2025², of those who commenced employment since 2015:

- Just 11% were offered a permanent position upon appointment; 89% were not
- Only 26% received a contract of full hours upon initial appointment; 74% did not, while it took 55% more than three years to receive a contract of full hours.

Affordability of the profession

Of those who entered the profession before 2015, 78% do not believe they could afford to become a teacher today, given cost-of-living issues, the likelihood of starting on a contract of low hours and the accommodation crisis.

Solutions - what needs to be done?

We've outlined the problems, but what are the solutions? How can this crisis be effectively tackled?

Clearly, the housing crisis affects all of society and must be dealt with on a national level, but there are a number of specific measures that would greatly alleviate the recruitment and retention crisis and enhance the service to students.

- In the first instance, schools must be provided with **greater teaching allocations** to allow more full-time, permanent jobs from initial appointment. Our own research shows that only 26% of those recently appointed received a contract of full hours upon commencement, with just 11% offered a permanent position on appointment. So much for teaching being a 'safe' and 'secure' job.
- **Career structures must be enhanced** to keep the job attractive and to boost

² TUI online survey of members, April 2025

retention. Posts of responsibility, which ensure the smooth running of schools and provide pastoral support for students, were cut during the last recession and have never been properly restored. Their loss has been keenly felt in school communities, increasing the workload of principals and deputy principals and reducing supports for students while eliminating promotional opportunities for teachers.

- **Halving the duration of the two-year Professional Master of Education (PME)** required to become a second level teacher would make the profession immediately and significantly more accessible to all in our society, particularly to those who cannot afford to pursue the profession. It is no longer acceptable that second-level teachers should have to complete a four-year degree followed by a two-year PME, being subsidised by family if they're fortunate enough to have this support or else being saddled with significant debt before they even apply for an initial teaching job that is unlikely to be on a permanent or full-time basis. Too many are being priced out of teaching.
- Currently, **teachers returning from positions in private schools outside the EU** are placed on the first point of the teachers' salary scale here despite the significant and demonstrable experience attained in teaching diverse curricula abroad. This affects the overwhelming majority of those who may wish to return to Ireland from countries such as Dubai. In many cases, they will simply choose to continue to teach outside Ireland or, if they do return, work in other employments where their transferrable skills are better appreciated. Ultimately, it is students who will lose out.
- The **reinstatement of allowances** payable for SEN qualification, teaching through Irish and Island allowances (all abolished in 2012) would also help in the recruitment and retention of teachers in these areas
- Finally, the **ever-increasing workload**, particularly that of a bureaucratic nature, that continues to be a demoralising factor in the profession and sees many leave for other employment must be tackled. Increasingly, teachers are expected to do more and more with less and less.

Why about the measures that have been implemented by Government to tackle the crisis?

By and large, the various small-scale actions announced by Government since this crisis began have been little more than 'sticking plaster' measures. These have not gone anywhere near enough to tackling the day-to-day problems of recruitment and retention in Irish schools.

It is now our firm belief that rather than tackling the root causes of these problems, the Department is content to 'ride out' the crisis until demographics result in a fall in student numbers and less demand for teachers. However, today's students only

get one chance to progress through second level, and the Department's reckless inaction is, in far too many schools, denying them the full educational experience that they are entitled to.

In addition, by not working towards properly resolving this crisis, we risk losing our best graduates to other employments where their qualifications and skills are better appreciated.

What about other countries?

We know from international colleagues that other jurisdictions are also struggling to recruit and retain teachers. However, rather than bringing any degree of comfort or complacency, this should be a warning to our own policy-makers, as it is clear that other countries are already aggressively recruiting our highly qualified and internationally respected Irish teachers to fill their own employment gaps. Such recruitment drives are likely to intensify as other countries experience their own problems.

The TUI urges you to make urgent representation so that the teacher recruitment and retention crisis can be properly tackled.



Should you require further information, please contact TUI President Anthony Quinn (president@tui.ie) or General Secretary Michael Gillespie (mgillespie@tui.ie)