



Department
for Education

Further Education Targeted Retention Incentive Evaluation

Interim report

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Glossary

CPD	Continuing professional development
DfE	Department for Education
DiD	Difference-in-Difference
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
EYQ	Early Years Qualification
FE	Further education
FEWDC	Further Education Workforce Data Collection
FTE	Full time equivalent
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDP	Gross domestic product
GFEC	General Further Education College
HR	Human Resources
IBO	International Baccalaureate Organisation
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MD	Management data
QED	Quasi-experimental design
RAP	Research and Analysis Pipeline
RQ	Research question
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SFC	Sixth Form College
SRO	Senior Responsible Owner
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TBE	Theory-based evaluation

ToC

Theory of change

TRI

Targeted Retention Incentive

Executive summary

The government's industrial strategy, [Invest 2035](#), identifies 8 'growth driving' sectors, several of which are heavily reliant on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills. However, significant shortages in technical and basic English and maths skills in the workforce risk limiting growth potential. The further education (FE) sector will play a pivotal role in addressing these gaps by upskilling the current workforce and preparing new talent, but providers face acute challenges retaining and recruiting qualified teachers, particularly in high demand academic subjects and vocational areas where vacancy rates are double the national average. To support retention, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the [FE Teacher Retention Incentive \(TRI\)](#) in 2023, offering annual payments of between £2,000 and £6,000 (after tax) to early career teachers in key STEM and technical subjects within statutory FE settings. The programme first ran from October 2024 to March 2025, targeting teachers of mainly 16-to-19-year-olds within their first 5 years of teaching. It has since been rolled out for a second year.

This report presents interim findings from the first year of the theory-based evaluation (TBE) of the FE TRI, based on research with Human Resource/Senior Leadership Team (HR/SLT) staff and FE TRI claimants in the statutory sector. At this stage in the evaluation, it is too early to fully assess whether the FE TRI has had a measurable impact. Therefore, the report focuses on progress towards the anticipated outcomes, any emerging evidence on the contribution of the FE TRI to observed changes, and how outcomes vary by participant and provider characteristics. There is emerging evidence from the first year of the evaluation that progress towards some of the intended outcomes has been achieved. In particular the report finds that the FE TRI is helping to mitigate some of the barriers for early career teachers by improving remuneration and increasing their sense of worth. The impact of the FE TRI will be explored further in the second year of the evaluation and the final report due to be published in 2027.

Evaluation aims and objectives

The aims of the evaluation are to capture robust evidence on the impact of the FE TRI on staff retention in priority subjects and to identify the extent to which the programme also supports recruitment and enhances teaching quality. To address these aims, both a TBE and quasi-experimental design (QED) are being implemented by [CFE](#) in partnership with [NFER](#). The results of the QED will be available in late 2027. The TBE will complement the QED by providing timely insight into the rollout and reach of the programme and evidence of progress towards its outcomes.

A theory of change (ToC) provides the framework for the TBE which is seeking to address 6 key research questions through a mixed methods approach:

1. What is the impact of the FE TRI on FE teacher retention and recruitment?
2. To what extent has the FE TRI contributed to the outcomes identified in the ToC, and what are the mechanisms underpinning this?
3. To what extent does evidence (both existing and collected through the evaluation) support the ToC?
4. How do contextual factors (e.g. participant demographics, socio-economic status and institutional practice/culture) affect the outcomes?
5. What lessons can be drawn from variations in different programme outcomes across different contexts?
6. Has the FE TRI led to perceptions of increased quality in provision among statutory providers (e.g. reduced disruption, increase in provision, fewer use of agency staff, reduced HR costs)?

The report is informed by:

- analysis of DfE management data (MD) on the reach and uptake of the FE TRI in the academic year 2024 to 2025
- surveys with 87 staff within HR and SLT of statutory FE providers and 2,943 FE teachers in receipt of the FE TRI payment (claimants)
- case study research in 8 providers involving 8 paired interviews with HR/SLT staff and 23 individual interviews with claimants.

Key findings

Programme reach and uptake

- According to the MD, DfE engaged 269 FE providers with the programme and awarded payments to 5,974 FE teachers in the academic year 2024 to 2025.
- Uptake of the payment met the expectations of HR/SLT staff interviewed. The most common subjects taught by claimants were building and construction (29%), followed by maths (23%) and engineering and manufacturing (20%).

Retention and recruitment challenges

- More than one-third of HR/SLT survey respondents (36%) found it difficult/very difficult to retain FE teaching staff, while nearly three-fifths (58%) of HR/SLT staff surveyed found it difficult/very difficult to recruit FE teaching staff.

- HR/SLT staff surveyed experienced the most significant retention and recruitment issues in building and construction (23%; 33%) and engineering and manufacturing (27%; 28%).
- The majority of HR/SLT survey respondents reported that FE teacher retention challenges have resulted in increased workload (91%), disruption to teaching (88%) and increased use of agency staff (87%). Recruitment issues are reported to have similar impacts.
- Four-fifths (80%) of claimants reported that they were satisfied working as an FE teacher.
- Of the 4% of claimants who reported they intended to, or were considering leaving the FE sector, pay was the biggest driver (77%) followed by workload (68%) and college culture/management (63%). Low pay was also reported as one of the main barriers to recruitment by HR/SLT staff interviewed.

Contribution of the FE TRI to FE retention outcomes

- Half of claimants surveyed (50%) agreed/strongly agreed they were paid fairly for their job (inclusive of the FE TRI payment). However, fewer (41%) agreed/strongly agreed their salary (including the FE TRI payment) compared favourably to people undertaking similar roles for other employers.
- Of the surveyed claimants who planned to continue working in the FE sector, almost all indicated that the payment had at least some impact on their decision to remain (96%); one-fifth (21%) of the same group said they would not have stayed teaching in FE without it.
- Many FE TRI claimants interviewed reported that their financial wellbeing had improved because the payment had reduced financial pressures caused by the rise in the cost of living. It had also enabled them to undertake activities that were otherwise unaffordable, for instance car repairs, paying off debts or building up savings.
- Many claimants interviewed regarded the payment as an acknowledgement of their skills and expertise and, as such, felt more valued.
- Some claimants interviewed reported improved job satisfaction, because the payment helped to offset the perceived drawbacks of being an FE teacher, including low pay.
- The quantitative analysis shows that the payment is more likely to encourage dual professionals, those who previously worked in industry and teachers of

apprenticeships, to remain in FE teaching, than teachers of other qualification types and backgrounds.

Contribution of the FE TRI to FE teacher recruitment outcomes

- Use of the FE TRI payment as a recruitment tool is currently limited, as is evidence of its impact on recruitment related outcomes including increased speed of recruitment, reduced operating costs, improved quality of candidates and reduced course closures due to staff shortages.

Emerging insights

- It is still too early to say definitively what the impact of the FE TRI on teacher retention and recruitment has been, but evidence from the year 1 survey and interview findings suggests that the FE TRI payment has achieved some of its anticipated short-term outcomes and there is evidence of progress towards some of its longer-term outcomes. This will be explored further in year 2 of the TBE and the QED will also examine the impact of the FE TRI on teacher retention.
- The FE TRI is helping to mitigate some of the financial and other barriers for early career teachers by improving remuneration and increasing their sense of worth.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This is the interim report for the theory-based evaluation (TBE) of the first year of the further education (FE) targeted retention incentive (TRI) for the academic year 2024 to 2025. It explores the reach of the payment, the effectiveness of its implementation, and emerging evidence about the extent to which it is supporting retention and recruitment-related outcomes for statutory FE providers.

The FE TRI

The government's ambition for sustainable growth is outlined in Invest 2035.¹ This green paper sets out the intention to focus support on 8 'growth-driving sectors'. The sectors include four with a strong focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) skills: advanced manufacturing, clean energy industries, digital and technologies, and life sciences. However, shortages of technical as well as basic English and mathematics skills are identified as a barrier to realising the growth potential of these sectors. Addressing these shortages is therefore a priority. This is highlighted in Labour's manifesto commitment to recruit 6,500 teachers.²

The FE sector has a key role in addressing skills needs by upskilling the current workforce and equipping the talent pipeline with the technical and transferable skills required by the growth-driving sectors. However, ensuring sufficient teaching staff with the appropriate knowledge and skills to deliver relevant qualifications and training in these priority sectors presents a significant challenge. FE providers are in direct competition with schools to fill teaching vacancies in high demand subjects such as mathematics, English and science. Furthermore, across all FE providers vacancy rates for teachers of vocational subjects, including construction, electronics, engineering and manufacturing, are all double the national average, and are amongst the hardest to fill.³

In late 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) announced the introduction of the FE TRI to improve teacher retention and recruitment in the statutory FE sector. This was an extension of the incentive payments currently implemented in schools.

The FE TRI provides a payment of between £2,000 and £6,000 per annum (after tax) to early career teachers in priority subjects. In the first round, which ran from October 2024

¹ Department for Business & Trade (2024) *Invest 2035: the UK's model industrial strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy/invest-2035-the-uks-modern-industrial-strategy> (Accessed: 12 January 2026)

² DfE (2026) *6,500 additional teachers delivery plan*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/6500-additional-teachers-delivery-plan-html-version> (Accessed: 5 March 2026)

³ DfE (2025) *Further education workforce – Academic year 2023/24* Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/further-education-workforce/2023-24> (Accessed: 20 February 2026)

until March 2025, these subjects were: building and construction, chemistry, computing (including digital and information and communication technology (ICT)), early years, engineering and manufacturing (including transport engineering and electronics), maths and physics. Teachers of these subjects were eligible to apply if they taught mainly 16-19-year-olds in general further education colleges (GFECs), sixth form colleges (SFCs), designated institutions and 16 to 19 only academies and schools, and had fewer than 5 years' teaching experience in FE.⁴ Applicants did not need to be a qualified teacher to receive the payment but those who were not had to be working towards or intending to enrol on a teaching qualification. Those teaching in the non-statutory sector (including independent training providers) were not eligible for the payment. Payments were weighted according to the proportion of disadvantaged students enrolled at the provider.⁵

The application window for Round 2 of the FE TRI opened in March 2026 and will run until May 2026.⁶ Funding beyond Round 2 of the FE TRI has not yet been confirmed.

About the evaluation

The aims of the evaluation are to capture robust evidence on the impact of the FE TRI on staff retention in priority subjects and to identify the extent to which the programme supports recruitment and enhances teaching quality. To address these aims, both a TBE and quasi-experimental design (QED) are being implemented by [CFE](#) in partnership with [NFER](#). The QED will use the Difference-in-Difference (DiD) framework using Further Education Workforce Data Collection (FEWDC) data to estimate the impact of the FE TRI on three outcomes, by subject: teacher retention (exit rates); unfilled vacancy rates; and teacher recruitment. The results of the QED will not be available until 2027. The TBE will therefore provide timely evidence about the outcomes of the FE TRI payment ahead of these results.

The TBE seeks to understand the underlying mechanisms that drive improvements to teacher retention and recruitment, and to quality of provision in the longer term. Where variations in impacts emerge, the TBE will examine how, why and for whom. The TBE sets out to identify the barriers and enablers of the FE TRI to understand the conditions conducive to its success.

⁴ DfE (2024) *Targeted retention incentive payments for FE teachers* Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/targeted-retention-incentive-payments-for-fe-teachers> (Accessed: 20 February 2026)

⁵ Teachers at FE providers with the highest proportion of disadvantaged students received higher payments. This calculation was based on the proportion of 16 to 19 students enrolled at the FE provider which attracted disadvantage funding in academic year 2022 to 2023 based on either: students' economic deprivation or low prior attainment in English and maths.

⁶ DfE (2024) *Targeted retention incentive payments for FE teachers* Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/targeted-retention-incentive-payments-for-fe-teachers> (Accessed: 5 March 2026)

The primary research questions (RQ) for the TBE are:

- RQ1 What is the impact of the FE TRI on FE teacher retention and recruitment?
- RQ2 To what extent has the FE TRI contributed to the outcomes identified in the theory of change (ToC), and what are the mechanisms underpinning this?
- RQ3 To what extent does evidence (both existing and collected through the evaluation) support the ToC?

The following research questions are also being considered as part of the TBE:

- RQ4 How do contextual factors (e.g. participant demographics, socio-economic status and institutional practice/culture) affect the outcomes?
- RQ5 What lessons can be drawn from variations in different programme outcomes across different contexts?
- RQ6 Has the FE TRI led to perceptions of increased quality in provision among statutory providers (e.g. reduced disruption, increase in provision, fewer use of agency staff, reduced HR costs)?

At this stage in the evaluation, it is too early to fully assess whether the FE TRI has had a measurable impact on FE teacher retention and recruitment (RQ1) or quality of provision (RQ6). This report, therefore, focuses on progress towards the outcomes identified in the ToC and emerging evidence on the contribution of the FE TRI to observed changes (RQ2 & RQ3). Drawing on the available data and insight, the report also considers how outcomes vary by participant and provider characteristics (RQ4 & RQ5). The research questions will be explored further in the second year of the evaluation and the findings published in the final report in 2027.

Approach

The ToC underpinning the TBE for the FE TRI identifies the anticipated short- and long-term outcomes of the payment contributing to programme impacts, alongside the programme assumptions and potential unintended consequences (Table 1). It provides the framework for the evaluation and informed the design of the data collection tools. Elements of realist evaluation and contribution analysis will be drawn on to understand if and how the FE TRI payment pathways to the desired outcomes differ by context through exploring individuals' reasoning, preferences, norms and beliefs.

Table 1: Theory of change for FE TRI

Theory of change for FE TRI					
Situation	There are significant recruitment and retention issues in the FE workforce		Aims	The delivery of the FE TRI to teachers in eligible subjects in statutory FE providers will improve retention and recruitment	
Inputs and activities	Outputs	Change mechanism	Outcomes	Impacts	
<p>Inputs</p> <p>Funding for FY2024/25 & FY2025/26</p> <p>Funding for evaluation</p> <p>Activities</p> <p>Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) Board – building the payment system and monitoring applications</p> <p>Development of a CLAIM platform for applications</p> <p>Eligibility criteria published</p> <p>Comms campaign</p>	<p>Payments to FE teachers who are in the first 5 years of teaching in FE TRI eligible subjects for 12 hours a week or more (c0.5 FTE):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £6k for teachers in providers in the top tier disadvantage weighting • £5k for teachers in providers in the middle tier disadvantage weighting • £4k for teachers in providers in lower tier disadvantage weighting 	<p>Eligible teachers apply for and receive payment to increase teacher supply and quality of candidate</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved teacher morale, job satisfaction and feelings of self-worth following receiving the payment</p> <p>(RETENTION) improved scope/opportunity for existing teachers to remain in FE teaching despite the increase in cost-of-living post pandemic</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Government investment in FE sector demonstrates sector is valued and improves public image of working in the sector and that FE teaching is a financially viable career</p>	<p>Short term</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved financial well-being</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved teacher morale, job satisfaction and sense of recognition</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Increase in recruitment choices for FE TRI eligible subjects in disadvantaged providers</p> <p>Long term</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved teacher retention across FE TRI eligible subjects in statutory FE providers</p> <p>(RETENTION) Reduction in FE teacher workload</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved quality of provision</p> <p>(RETENTION) Improved FE teacher occupational health and wellbeing</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Increase in speed of recruitment</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Reduction in operating costs associated with recruitment and retention</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Increase in the quality of recruited candidates</p> <p>(RECRUITMENT) Reduction of course closures due to staff shortages</p>	<p>Increased opportunities to engage in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and progress to senior roles</p> <p>Increased capacity to deliver priority subjects and to meet student demand</p> <p>Improved learner outcomes, particularly for those in high disadvantage areas</p> <p>Reduction in skills shortages across UK sectors supporting increase in gross domestic product (GDP) growth</p>	

Theory of change for FE TRI			
Evidence assessment	Poor pay is likely to be a primary barrier to recruitment and retention in the FE sector		
Assumptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High percentage of teachers claim the payment • FE pay compares poorly to other education sectors and industry in eligible subjects/sectors • Payment leads to teachers staying in the FE profession • Payment attracts new teachers into the sector, including those from industry • Payment leads to more talent entering the profession • Payment leads to improved morale, which in turn leads to improved teaching quality 	Possible unintended consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers will take the payment and still quit the profession as there is no obligation to return the payment. Risk of cliff-edge to recruitment and retention once payment no longer available • Negative impact on non-eligible teachers (i.e. teachers that teach other subjects) and teachers that have been in the profession beyond 5-years • Creates gaps in non-statutory FE providers • Small risk that teachers will switch to different sectors/subjects to get the payment creating gaps elsewhere

A mixed-methods approach is being implemented for the TBE which combines analysis of management data (MD) on the FE TRI with surveys and qualitative research with teachers and Human Resources (HR)/senior leadership team (SLT) staff across the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

The findings in this report are informed by:

Management data (MD)

DfE provided MD on FE providers and FE TRI claimants for the academic year 2024 to 2025. The fields used for analysis included: FE TRI award amount, teaching hours per week, subjects taught, name of provider, type of provider, whether claim approved, tier of disadvantage funding, and region. The MD also included the contact details for FE providers and FE TRI claimants which were used to disseminate the surveys.

Surveys of HR/SLT staff and teachers

In the academic year 2024 to 2025 (prior to the FE TRI payment being administered), DfE designed and disseminated short, 5-minute, online surveys for FE teachers and HR/SLT staff in the statutory and non-statutory sectors. These surveys captured teachers' experiences of working in the FE sector and their future career intentions. HR/SLT staff were asked for their views on retention and recruitment challenges within the sector and the use of incentives to provide insight into the context for FE TRI and to inform the evaluation.⁷ These surveys are not included in the evaluation, and the findings are not covered in this report.

To enable changes in these key outcomes to be measured, key questions from the DfE's own baseline surveys were included in the end of year 1 surveys with HR/SLT staff in the statutory sector and FE TRI claimants that were designed and administered by CFE.

The profile of year 1 HR/SLT staff and FE TRI claimant survey respondents and how they compared to the population in receipt of the payment are included in [Appendix 2](#). Respondents of both surveys were representative of the population.⁸

Year 1 HR/SLT survey

The HR/SLT survey of staff in the statutory sector sought feedback about the FE TRI payment and views about the context of FE teacher retention and recruitment within their organisation. The survey was administered online in June 2025 to HR/SLT staff in 269

⁷ The baseline surveys designed and disseminated by DfE have been analysed separately and do not form part of the TBE. The findings are not included in this report which focuses on benefits and emerging outcomes of the payment and contextual factors about the current status of the sector which were explored via the year 1 surveys.

⁸ The MD used for the survey samples was correct at the time of their dissemination. However, it differs slightly from the published MD which was updated following additional checks and data cleaning to ensure numbers reflect individual teachers, including removing duplicate claims.

statutory providers with FE teachers who had received payments in the first round of the TRI.

A telephone boost was implemented in the final week before the survey closed to follow up providers in the sample to increase the number of responses. The boost targeted HR/SLT staff in the 61 providers with the largest number of FE TRI recipients.⁹

A total of 87 providers responded to the survey, a response rate of 32%.

Year 1 FE TRI claimant survey

The online claimant survey was disseminated at the same time as the HR/SLT survey to 6,019 FE teachers¹⁰ in the statutory sector who had successfully claimed the FE TRI payment. As respondents answered the survey following confirmation of receiving the FE TRI payment, this could bring in an element of response bias. The survey invited respondents to share their experience of teaching in the FE sector and perceived impacts of the FE TRI payment. The QED findings will aim to provide a more robust assessment of the programme's impacts.

Two reminders were sent in addition to the survey invitation to increase the number of responses. In total, 2,943 FE teachers responded to the survey, a response rate of 49%. As the sample was self-selecting, the findings may not be representative of all FE TRI claimants.

Case study interviews

Over the course of the TBE, case study research will be conducted with 12 providers, in addition to interviews with staff in the non-statutory sector. The first wave of case study research was completed in autumn 2025 with 8 FE providers employing FE TRI claimants.

A sample frame of 52 providers was generated from a recall question in the HR/SLT survey, cross-referenced against FE TRI claimant survey respondents who also agreed to re-contact. The 8 case study providers were purposefully selected to ensure that a variety of experiences of the FE TRI could be explored. The selection criteria took account of the number of FE TRI claimants, type of provider, size of provider, geographic location, Ofsted rating, range of subjects taught by FE TRI claimants, and value of FE TRI payment awarded to staff.

⁹ The telephone boost generated 8 more survey responses.

¹⁰ The survey sample was slightly larger than the 5,974 FE TRI claimants reported in the MD, which is the final sample that DfE approved later in the year after the survey was disseminated. The final data is reported in: DfE (2025) *Targeted retention incentive for FE teachers: final data for academic year 2024 to 2025*. Available at: Targeted retention incentive for FE teachers: final data for academic year 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK (Accessed on 13 January 2026)

At each of the 8 FE providers, a depth paired interview was conducted online or in-person with a representative from HR and the SLT. Individual interviews were conducted with 2 to 4 FE teachers who had received the FE TRI in each setting (23 in total). The breakdown of interviews per FE provider and the profile is set out in [Appendix 2](#).

Advisory group

In line with standard practice for TBEs, an advisory group with representatives from the FE statutory and non-statutory sector has been established to provide independent advice, scrutiny and constructive challenge to support the evaluation of the FE TRI programme. The advisory group members help to strengthen the evaluation by offering evidence-informed perspectives on the methodology and research findings. The insights from the first year of the TBE evaluation were presented to and discussed with the advisory group and then developed as a result of its input.

Analysis

As the HR/SLT survey achieved less than 100 respondents overall, both the number of responses and the proportion is reported. Where figures are represented as percentages in charts they should be treated with caution, particularly where the base size is less than 50.

The opportunity for bivariate analysis on the HR/SLT survey was limited by the small base sizes. Where feasible, analysis compares a maximum of 2 sub-groups. Bivariate analysis in the form of Z-test column proportions and column means (T-Tests), was, however, feasible on the FE TRI claimant survey because of the larger sample size. Differences are explored by FE provider characteristics (type of provider, size based on number of full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, and number of FE TRI claimants) and FE TRI claimant attributes (subject taught, qualification level taught, whether dual professional, previous occupation, FE TRI award amount, and intention to stay working in FE).

Any statistically significant differences at the 5% level between sub-groups are reported in the text of the report. Where statistical differences were identified for type of provider, size of provider and number of FE TRI claimants, only those for type of provider are reported because the three characteristics reflect each other (i.e. GFECs are likely to be larger and have more FE TRI claimants). Where percentages in figures don't total 100%, this is due to rounding.

The interview findings provide useful insight but cannot be considered representative of the FE sector. The interview transcripts were analysed in NVivo using a coding frame derived from concepts in the research questions. Attributes were assigned to each transcript to identify similarities and differences between sub-groups.

Chapter 2: FE TRI reach and implementation

Ensuring eligible teachers apply for and receive the FE TRI payment is a key assumption in the programme ToC, as lack of engagement will mitigate the impact of the FE TRI on teacher retention and recruitment in the FE sector. This chapter explores the reach of the FE TRI during its first year of delivery and how this differed by provider and claimant characteristics. Perceptions about the effectiveness of the application process and promotional methods used by FE providers are also explored.

Reach

Number of teachers receiving FE TRI

The FE TRI reached 5,974 teachers from 269 providers. DfE published a breakdown of the FE TRI payments by claimant and provider characteristics.¹¹ The vast majority of payments (94%) were awarded to FE teachers who taught 12 or more hours per week. Most FE claimants received £6,000 (83%) with the average award being £5,700. Most of the FE TRI payments were awarded to FE teachers working in GFECs (91%)¹² and providers with the greatest proportion of disadvantaged learners (88%)¹³. Successful claimants were located in providers across all regions of England. The number of claimants per region ranged from 461 in London to 1,028 in the North West. All 112 FE providers with more than 20 successful FE TRI claimants were GFECs. This is to be expected as GFECs have more staff than other types of FE providers and are more likely to deliver all subjects eligible for the FE TRI.

Take up

Most HR/SLT interviewees reported that nearly all eligible staff applied for the TRI. The eligibility criteria were clearly communicated by HR teams interviewed as part of the case studies. Although the overall number of claimants varied by provider, uptake generally met the expectations of HR/SLT staff interviewed.

¹¹ DfE (2025) *Targeted retention incentive for FE teachers: final data for academic year 2024 to 2025*. Available at: [Targeted retention incentive for FE teachers: final data for academic year 2024 to 2025 - GOV.UK](#) (Accessed on 13 January 2026)

¹² Followed by 16 to 19 only schools and academies (5%) and the SFCs (4%).

¹³ This is based on the proportion of 16 to 19 students enrolled at the FE provider which attracted disadvantage funding in academic year 2022 to 2023 based on either: students' economic deprivation or low prior attainment in English and maths.

Differences by subject

Around three-quarters of FE teachers awarded the FE TRI payment taught building and construction (29%), maths (23%), or engineering and manufacturing (20%) (Table 2).

Table 2: Subjects taught by FE teachers awarded the FE TRI payment in 2024 to 2025

Subject	Frequency	Percent
Building and construction	1,715	29%
Maths	1,369	23%
Engineering and manufacturing (including transport engineering and electronics)	1,195	20%
Computing (including digital and ICT)	626	10%
Early years	518	9%
Chemistry	172	3%
Physics	93	2%
Applicants teaching two or more of the seven eligible subject areas	286	5%
Total	5,974	100%

Source: Published DfE FE TRI MD for academic year 2024 to 2025 Where percentages don't total 100%, this is due to rounding.

HR/SLT staff interviewees' description of uptake by subject reflects the curriculum profiles of the different FE provider types. More TRI claimants were employed by GFECs which typically have a vocational focus, while fewer worked in SFCs or 16-19 schools and colleges typically specialising in A-level provision, including subjects such as chemistry and physics.

Implementation

Promotion of the FE TRI

Insight from the case study interviews suggested that HR/SLT staff most frequently learned about the FE TRI via emails or newsletters from DfE or the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)¹⁴. The majority of HR/SLT survey respondents (92%)

¹⁴ The ESFA closed and transitioned its functions to DfE in March 2025.

subsequently promoted the FE TRI payment to eligible FE teachers¹⁵, amongst these the most common method used was email (80%). Other popular means of promotion were departmental meetings (39%), internal newsletters (37%) and word of mouth (35%).¹⁶

Most FE TRI claimants interviewed heard about the FE TRI payment via colleagues, either directly in their own college, or through friends. Others found out about the FE TRI via emails from their HR teams, college bulletins, general online searches and forums, LinkedIn, or recruitment consultants. These findings suggest that whilst most FE providers promoted the FE TRI payment via email, word of mouth was more effective at raising FE teachers' awareness about it.

Insight from HR/SLT interviewees suggests that providers were less likely to promote the FE TRI to prospective teachers to support recruitment. This is because the way in which it was presented to them, including the name of the programme, suggested its purpose was to support staff retention. Furthermore, there was insufficient lead in time to the programme to incorporate information about the FE TRI into providers' recruitment materials.

Application process

What worked well

Most HR/SLT and FE TRI claimant interviewees initially feared the application process would be complex due to the extent and nature of the eligibility criteria. However, they found the guidance on the government website helped them to navigate the process. HR/SLT interviewees reported that the main tasks they fulfilled in relation to the application process were interpreting the eligibility criteria, checking applicants' employment details, and verifying applications. These tasks were reported to be straightforward to complete. Interviewees also appreciated that DfE managed the payment process as this reduced the administrative burden for FE providers.

Another great advantage of the FE TRI is that we don't have to process it. It doesn't hit our payroll, and mess up our data and reporting, and there's no delays on that. Us having a validation role, rather than an additional processing role, is really helpful... with so many different types of schemes over the years, there's been some complexities about payments being made. *HR/SLT staff member*

¹⁵ HR/SLT survey question: Has your organisation promoted the FE TRI payment to eligible teachers this academic year (2024/25)? (Base=87)

¹⁶ HR/SLT survey question: What method(s) has your organisation used to promote the FE TRI payment this academic year (2024/25)? (Base=79)

The FE TRI claimants interviewed considered the online application process to be easy to follow and intuitive. They were grateful that the burden of responsibility for the application verification process fell to FE providers.

You had to provide sufficient information and then the college had to provide the proof that you were working, which takes the burden from you... It's not an application that requires you to take a lot of time off your teaching schedule in order to complete it. *FE TRI claimant*

What worked less well

Only a few interviewees referenced aspects of the FE TRI application process which worked less well:

- some HR/SLT and FE TRI claimants reported there was a lack of communication about whether claims had been approved
- some FE TRI claimants indicated they had been uncertain about who was responsible for approving their claim, their FE provider or the government

The ease with which FE providers could undertake the verification process depended on their ability to access the information DfE required.

We hold the information about how many hours [staff] are contracted to do a week, but we don't know exactly what subjects they are teaching, and what age their students are. *HR/SLT staff member*

In addition, there was frustration among a few HR/SLT staff and FE TRI claimants interviewed about the later application window for the second year of the FE TRI (March 2026) compared to the first year (October 2025). Interviewees reported that attrition is greater during the first (autumn) term of the academic year so staff who could benefit from the FE TRI could leave before the application window opens, thus there is a risk that the later window could reduce the effectiveness of the programme. The rationale for the revised timing of the application window is to ensure FE TRI claimants teach for the full academic year before receiving the payment, thus reducing the risk of them leaving shortly after receiving the payment.

Administration of the FE TRI payments

The FE TRI payments of between £2,000 and £6,000 per annum (after tax) were administered to successful claimants in a single lump sum. A few interviewees suggested distributing the FE TRI payment across monthly instalments would provide more consistent financial support.

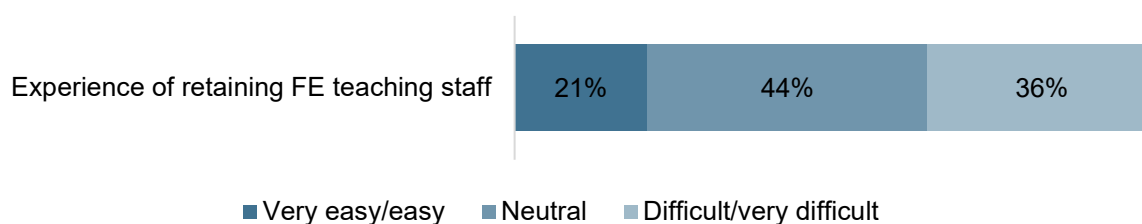
Chapter 3: Challenges in FE teacher retention

This chapter explores the retention challenges currently facing the FE statutory sector, highlighting the subjects where attrition presents a particularly significant issue. FE TRI claimants' and HR/SLT staff perceptions about the extent to which pay is a principal barrier, and whether the FE TRI payment will help to address it, are also provided.

Current retention landscape

Retaining teaching staff in the FE statutory sector is challenging for some providers. More than one-third of HR/SLT staff surveyed (36%; n=31) find it difficult/very difficult to retain FE teaching staff compared with one-fifth (21%; n=18) who find it easy/very easy (Figure 1). A statistically significant higher proportion of HR/SLT respondents from GFECs (51%; n=27) reported finding it difficult/very difficult to retain FE teaching staff than those from other providers¹⁷ (12%; n=4).

Figure 1: HR/SLT staff's experience of retaining FE teachers



Source: HR/SLT survey – Overall, in your organisation, how easy or difficult is it to retain FE teaching staff? (Base=87). Percentages should be treated with caution as base size is less than 100. Where percentages don't total 100%, this is due to rounding.

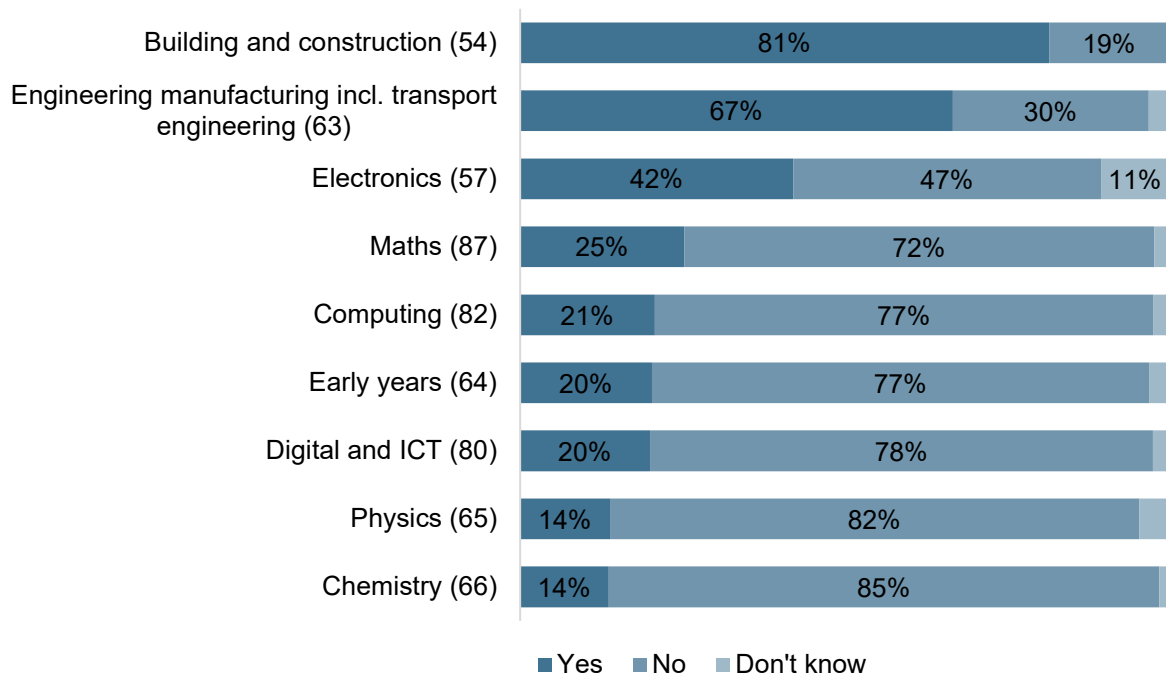
Subjects experiencing retention issues

When HR/SLT staff were asked which FE TRI-eligible subjects they experienced retention issues with, four-fifths of HR/SLT respondents (81%; n=44) cited building and construction. Two-thirds reported retention issues in engineering manufacturing (67%; n=42) and two-fifths in electronics (42%; n=24) (Figure 2).¹⁸ According to HR/SLT respondents, the FE TRI subjects with the least retention difficulties are chemistry and physics (both 14%; n=9).

¹⁷ 'Other providers' include: 16 to 19 only schools and academies, institutes for adult learning, and specialist FE colleges.

¹⁸ 13 respondents indicated they had retention issues with 'other' subjects. Of the 'other' subjects specified, the most frequent is health and social care (n=4).

Figure 2: Subjects with which FE providers experience retention issues¹⁹



Source: HR/SLT survey – Are you experiencing any retention issues in your organisation for any of the following subjects? (Bases vary – see each statement).

The HR/SLT staff surveyed were then asked to select the single subject in which they experience the most retention issues. HR/SLT respondents were most likely to select building and construction (33%; n=20) and engineering manufacturing (28%; n=17).²⁰ Fewer HR/SLT survey respondents identified experiencing most retention challenges with maths (8%; n=5) and early years (5%; n=3). No respondents selected chemistry or physics as the single subject with which they experience the most retention issues. Retention of teaching staff in building and construction, engineering and maths were presenting significant challenges in the case study providers. HR/SLT interviewees recognised that skills in these subjects were in demand and that FE teachers (particularly those newly recruited) were often attracted by better pay at competitor FECs, schools or in industry.

Length of time in post

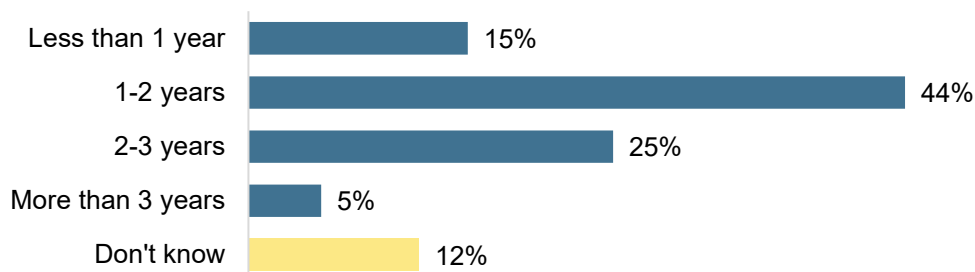
According to HR/SLT respondents, most staff who teach subjects with the highest rates of attrition remain in FE for less than 3 years on average. Only 5% (n=3) of HR/SLT

¹⁹ The subject categories employed in the survey reflect those used in the FEWDC. However, these differ to those used in the FE TRI guidance, specifically computing (including digital and ICT) and engineering and manufacturing (including transport engineering and electronics).

²⁰ HR/SLT survey question: From the subjects that you selected, which one is your organisation experiencing the most retention issues with? (Base=61)

survey respondents reported that FE teachers of shortage subjects stay in post for more than three years on average (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Average length of time FE teachers who teach a subject with the most retention issues are perceived to stay in post



Source: HR/SLT survey – Please indicate the average length of time a teacher who teaches [subject with most retention issues] is likely to stay in post (Base=61).

HR/SLT interviewees observed contrasting staff retention patterns. They reported staff turnover is most likely to occur in the first 1 to 2 years. Those that remain after this, often stay in post for many years. HR/SLT interviewees noted that it is during these early years that FE teachers come to understand the demands of the role (including challenging elements such as student behaviour management) and this knowledge and experience determines whether they decide to pursue a career in FE teaching in the longer term.

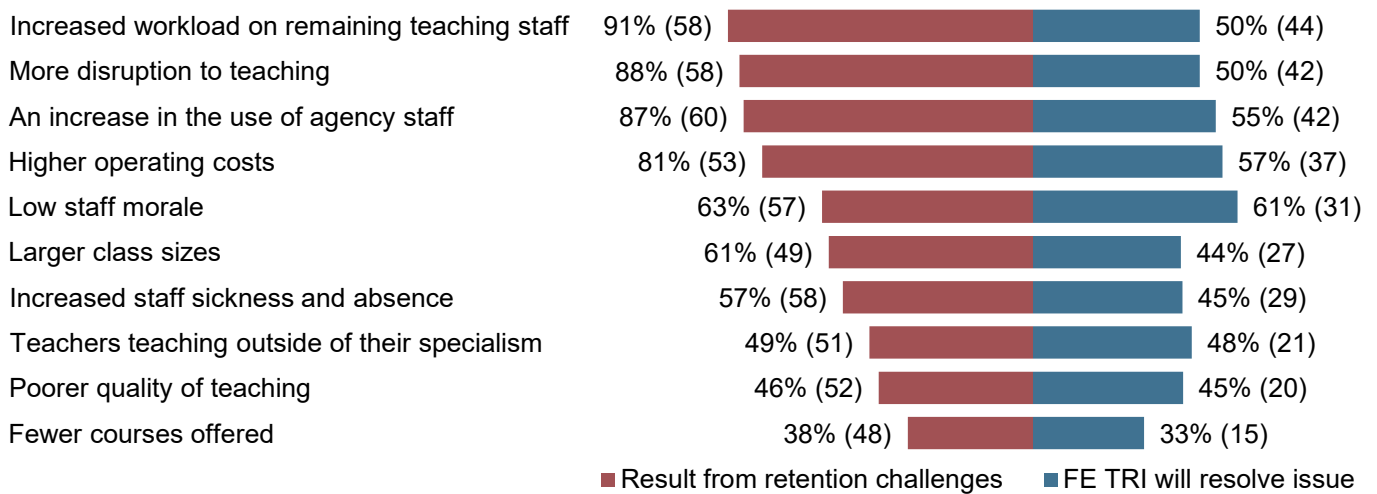
What we tend to find is that if people stay, they tend to stay with us for a while. But if they're going to leave, they leave within the first 12 months.
HR/SLT staff member

Impact of retention issues on providers

HR/SLT survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that FE teacher retention challenges have resulted in negative outcomes, particularly increased workload for remaining teaching staff (91%; n=53), more disruption to teaching (88%; n=51), increased use of agency staff (87%; n=52) and higher operating costs (81%; n=43) (Figure 4). A statistically significant higher proportion of HR/SLT respondents from larger providers²¹ agreed/strongly agreed that FE teacher retention challenges have resulted in the increased use of agency staff (96%; n=27) than their counterparts from smaller providers (79%; n=22).

²¹ Larger providers are those defined as having an above average number of FTE staff whilst smaller providers have an average or below average number of FTE staff. The definition is based on the DfE FE TRI MD available when the HR/SLT survey was disseminated in June 2025.

Figure 4: Proportion of HR/SLT staff who agree/strongly agree factors result from retention challenges and that the FE TRI will help resolve them



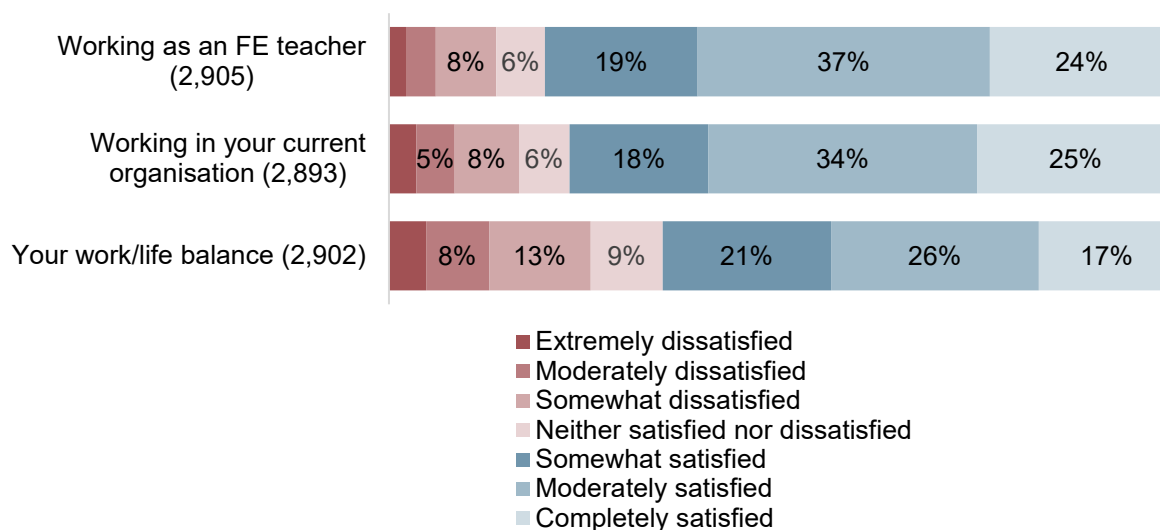
Source: HR/SLT survey – To what extent to you agree or disagree that FE teacher retention challenges in your organisation have resulted in... (Bases vary – see each statement); HR/SLT survey - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the FE TRI payment will help to resolve the following retention issues in your organisation? (Base sizes vary).

Although half of survey respondents (50%) agreed/strongly agreed that the FE TRI would help to address the most common challenges of increased workload (n=22) and disruption to teaching (n=21), a greater proportion reported that it would have a positive impact on staff morale (61%; n=19). Just under half of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed that staff retention challenges were impacting the quality of provision (46%; n=24) and a similar proportion reported that the FE TRI would help to mitigate this (45%; n=9).

FE teacher satisfaction

Despite the retention issues faced by HR/SLT staff, FE TRI claimants reported high levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their job (Figure 5). Four-fifths (80%) of FE TRI claimants reported being satisfied (somewhat/moderately/completely) working as an FE teacher. A similarly high proportion of FE TRI claimants (77%) reported being satisfied (somewhat/moderately/completely) working in their current organisation. FE TRI claimants were less satisfied with their work/life balance, with just under two-thirds (65%) reporting that they were satisfied (somewhat/moderately/completely).

Figure 5: FE TRI claimants' perceptions of their working life



Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Reflecting on this academic year (2024/25), please rate your overall satisfaction of... (Bases vary – see each statement).

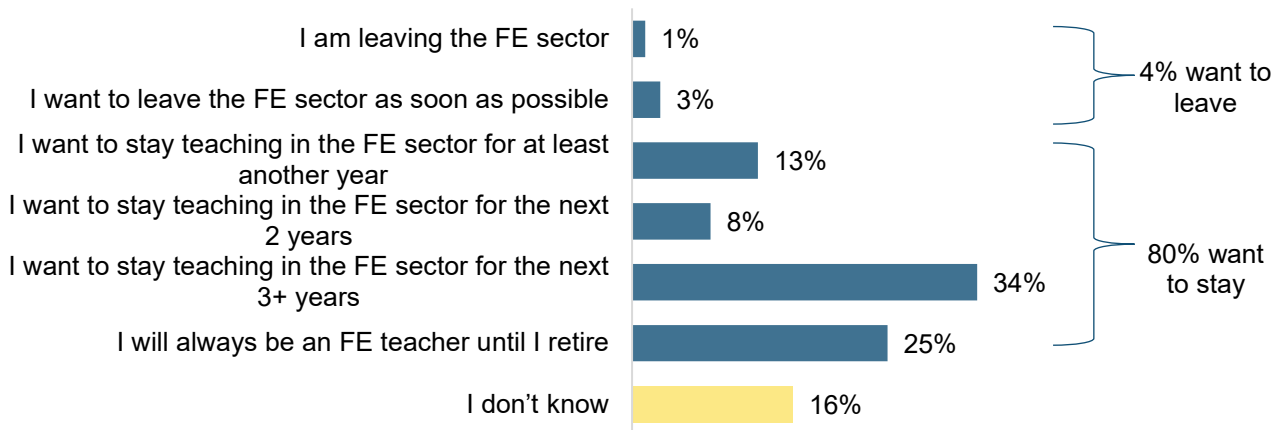
Some groups of survey respondents reported statistically significant higher levels of dissatisfaction across all three measures:

- those who started teaching in FE in 2020 were more likely to be dissatisfied than those who started in 2024: working as an FE teacher (18% versus 11%); working in your current organisation (22% versus 13%); and work/life balance (37% versus 19%)
- those planning to leave teaching in the FE sector were more likely to be dissatisfied than those who were planning to stay: working as an FE teacher (70% versus 9%); working in your current organisation (71% versus 12%); and work/life balance (72% versus 21%).

Whilst the majority of FE TRI claimants surveyed (80%) indicated that they wished to continue teaching in the FE sector for at least another year, 4%²² reported they were either in the process of leaving the sector (1%) or wished to leave as soon as possible (3%) (Figure 6). A statistically significant higher proportion of FE TRI claimants who started teaching in FE in 2020 (10%) indicated that they intended to leave the FE sector than those who started in 2024 (4%).

²² This attrition rate could differ to others reported for the FE sector due to the sample being self-selecting. It is not necessarily representative of all FE TRI claimants as they completed the survey after receiving confirmation their claim had been approved which could result in response bias.

Figure 6: FE TRI claimants' intentions of working as an FE teacher



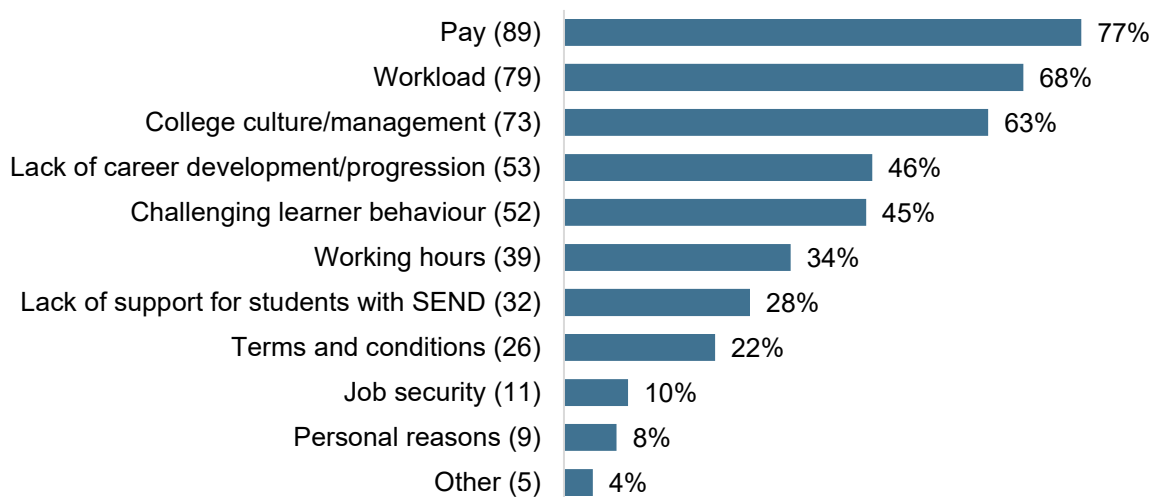
Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Please select one option that best describes your intentions of working as a teacher in the FE sector (Base=2,858).

Reasons for retention challenges

The year 1 survey and interview findings suggest that pay is a key barrier to FE staff retention, but other factors such as workload, college culture and career progression also contribute to the challenging context faced by the FE sector.

For the 4% (n=116) of FE TRI claimants surveyed who expressed their intention to leave the FE sector, pay was the largest driver (77%) followed by workload (68%) and college culture/management (63%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Reasons why FE teachers were leaving or considering leaving the sector



Source: FE TRI claimant survey - Please tell us the reasons why are you leaving or considering leaving teaching in FE (Base=116).

The couple of FE TRI claimant interviewees who indicated that they planned to leave the sector cited low pay compared with similar jobs in schools or high workload in comparison with other sectors as the drivers for their decisions. Poor pay and working conditions were also highlighted by another FE TRI claimant:

I'm living in London, I'm married and we have a son, and definitely things are very tight now. I get up very early in the morning, I get home very late, and then I have to work in the evenings [and] over the weekend, and then it's difficult sometimes to reach the end of the [pay] month. *FE TRI claimant*

Of the FE TRI claimant survey respondents who were intending to leave or considering leaving the FE sector, nearly half (45%; n=52) planned to leave teaching to work in industry and one-fifth (21%; n=24) intended to stay teaching but in a school.²³ As noted above, newly recruited teachers – particularly those in engineering, electrical installations, and maths – were perceived to be more likely to be attracted to better pay at competitor FE colleges, schools or in industry by HR/SLT interviewees.

...We have some that have been through our teacher training, and because they're really good at teaching these topics, which are really difficult to recruit to, they then get poached for more money from schools or from other colleges. *HR/SLT staff member*

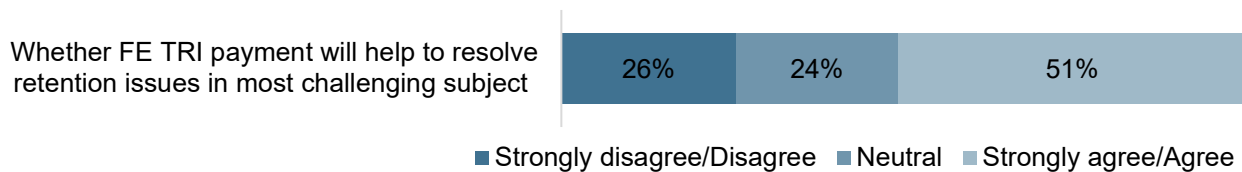
Better remuneration would influence the decisions of FE teachers planning to leave the sector. Of those who were intending to leave or considering leaving the sector (n=116), nearly half FE TRI indicated that a higher financial incentive would encourage them to remain in their role (49%).²⁴ A further 37% of these respondents reported it might influence their decision.

HR/SLT staff also perceived that higher remuneration would have a positive impact on retention issues. Half of HR/SLT staff surveyed (51%; n=28) agreed/strongly agreed that the FE TRI payment would help to resolve retention issues in their most challenging subject, but a quarter (26%; n=14) disagreed/strongly disagreed (Figure 8).

²³ FE TRI claimant survey – Please select one option that best describes where you think you will be moving to next after leaving the FE sector (n=116)

²⁴ FE TRI claimant survey – Would a higher financial incentive encourage you to remain teaching in the FE sector? (n=116)

Figure 8: HR/SLT staff's views about the influence of FE TRI payment on retention issues



Source: HR/SLT survey – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the FE TRI payment will help to resolve retention issues in [most difficult subject to retain] (Base = 55).

Chapter 4: Impact of FE TRI on teacher retention

The FE TRI programme ToC sets out a number of outcomes that are assumed to contribute towards improved teacher retention amongst those in receipt of the payment in the longer term. Short-term outcomes include improved financial wellbeing, teacher morale and job satisfaction, along with a sense of recognition. This chapter presents emerging evidence about the extent to which the FE TRI is contributing to these outcomes (RQ2) and the role and influence of wider contextual factors (RQ4).

In the longer term, the hope is that the improved retention brought about by the payment will lead to a reduction in FE teacher workload, improved quality of provision and improved FE teacher occupational health and wellbeing. These longer-term outcomes are beyond the scope of this interim report and will be more widely explored in the final report in 2027.

The ToC also identified potential unintended consequences of the FE TRI payment. These are also explored in this chapter along with the implications for teacher retention.

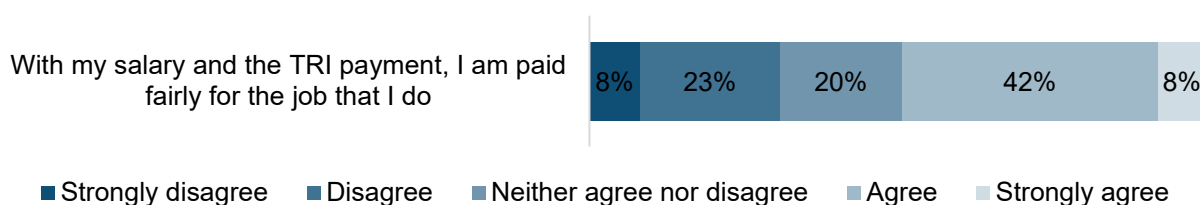
Emerging outcomes of FE TRI on teacher retention

Evidence from the year 1 survey and interview findings suggests that the FE TRI payment has achieved some of its anticipated short-term outcomes and there is evidence of progress towards some of its longer-term outcomes.

FE staff perceptions about pay including FE TRI payment

When reflecting on their salary, including the FE TRI payment, half of the FE TRI claimants surveyed (50%) agreed/strongly agreed they were paid fairly for the job they do whilst 31% disagreed/strongly disagreed (Figure 9).

Figure 9: FE TRI claimants' perceptions of their salary including the FE TRI payment



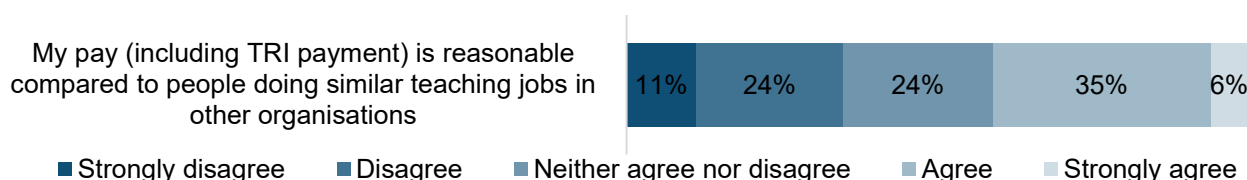
Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Thinking about this academic year (2024/25), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Base=2,908).

Further analysis revealed some statistically significant differences in perceptions of pay between groups of FE TRI claimants:

- those awarded higher amounts were more likely to agree/strongly agree (£4,000 to £5,000 51%; £6,000 50%) that they were paid fairly than those who awarded a lower amount less (£3,000 or less 35%)
- those planning to stay in the FE sector (55%) were more likely to agree/strongly agree that they were paid fairly compared with those who were intending to leave (22%)
- those teaching early years were more likely to disagree/strongly disagree (38%) that they were paid fairly than those teaching building and construction (28%)
- those with a teaching qualification were more likely to disagree/strongly disagree (32%) that they were paid fairly compared with those without (28%).

When they compared their salary (including the FE TRI payment) to people undertaking similar roles for other employers, FE TRI claimants' views were somewhat divided. Two-fifths (41%) of survey respondents agreed/strongly agreed their pay was reasonable while 35% disagreed/strongly disagreed (Figure 10).

Figure 10: FE TRI claimants' perceptions of their salary including the FE TRI payment in comparison with people doing similar teaching jobs in other organisations



Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Thinking about this academic year (2024/25), how much do you agree or disagree with the following statement? (Base=2,901).

Once again, statistically significant differences by FE TRI claimant characteristics were identified:

- more teachers of chemistry and engineering/manufacturing were likely to agree/strongly agree (50% and 43% respectively) that their pay was comparable to those doing similar roles in other organisations than those teaching early years (32%).

Short-term outcomes

The year 1 surveys did not include questions about short-term outcomes identified in the ToC, however, the year 2 surveys will explore these to ascertain the contribution of the FE TRI payment compared to other factors and initiatives. In the meantime, the interview findings provide some evidence that the FE TRI is achieving its retention-related short-term outcomes.

Improved financial wellbeing

Despite pay being identified as one of the least rewarding aspects of teaching in FE, many of the FE TRI claimants interviewed, reported that their financial wellbeing had already improved as a result of the payment. Interviewees (most of whom had received the highest payment amount) described several ways in which the FE TRI had positively impacted their financial wellbeing. These included reducing their stress by enabling them to cover unexpected costs (e.g. car repairs) or manage the increased cost of living. The payment was also reported to have enabled teacher claimants to strengthen their financial security by either paying off debts or building up savings.

The FE TRI gives you that little bit of tranquillity... to know that you have a little [financial] back-up there. *FE TRI claimant*

Improved sense of recognition, teacher morale and job satisfaction

Many of the claimants interviewed regarded the FE TRI as an acknowledgement by their employer and/or government of their skills and the effort they invest in their job, which in turn resulted in them feeling more valued. This is a positive finding because 'being valued and recognised in wider society' was ranked the second least rewarding aspect of working in FE by FE TRI claimants who responded to the survey.

I feel a little more recognised and since it's coming from the government, you feel a little better. *FE TRI claimant*

Interview findings also suggest the FE TRI payment has improved claimants' morale which in turn increased their motivation to push through stressful periods in their role, such as the exam season.

FE TRI claimant interviewees also reported higher job satisfaction as result of receiving the payment because it had helped offset the perceived drawbacks of being an FE teacher, such as low pay and high workload.

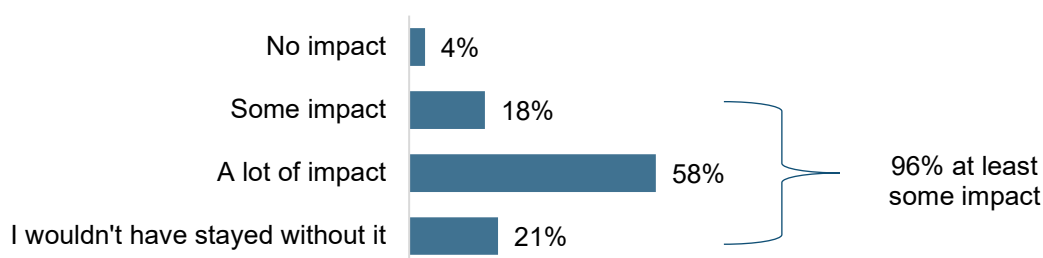
The year 2 TBE will explore whether increased recognition as a result of receiving the FE TRI leads to improved job satisfaction and teacher morale and that, in turn, if this increases the likelihood that a recipient will remain in FE.

Long-term outcomes

Improved teacher retention across FE TRI eligible subjects

The FE TRI claimant survey results indicate the payment has had a positive impact on the decisions of the overwhelming majority of FE teachers who wished to remain as a teacher in the FE sector. For the 80% of FE TRI claimants surveyed who self-reported that they plan to continue working in the sector,²⁵ the payment had at least some impact on the decision of 96% of these and one-fifth (21%) indicated they would not have stayed teaching in FE without it (Figure 11). This reported reduction in the attrition rate should be treated with caution as the survey sample is self-selecting. Therefore, it is not necessarily representative of all FE teachers. Respondents completed the survey after receiving confirmation their claim had been approved which could result in some response bias. The QED will examine the impact of the FE TRI on teacher retention further.

Figure 11: Impact of FE TRI payment on decision of claimants who intend to remain working in their role



Source: FE TRI claimant survey – What impact has the FE TRI payment had on your decision to remain working as a teacher in FE? (Base=2,284).

The FE TRI had a statistically significant differential effect on claimant groups. Those who were more likely to report that they would not have stayed teaching in the FE sector without the payment were:

- dual professionals: 26% compared with 19% of non-dual professionals
- FE teachers of building and construction: 27% compared with 16% of teachers of computing and early years and 17% of maths teachers
- teachers of apprenticeships: 28% compared with 18% of those who teach GCSEs and 13% who teach Early Years Qualifications (EYQ)

²⁵ FE TRI claimant survey: Please select one option that best describes your intentions of working as a teacher in the FE sector. (Base=2,858)

- respondents who had previously worked in industry: 25% compared with 17% of those who had previously worked in the public sector.

The FE TRI claimant interviews suggest that, for some FE teachers, the payment had a positive impact on their intention to remain working in the sector by improving their financial wellbeing. Feeling more financially secure as a result of the FE TRI has reduced their inclination to seek higher-paid roles elsewhere and increased their willingness to continue despite the challenges of the role.

The incentive payment makes [the challenges experienced working in the FE sector] a lot more manageable. It brings you a lot closer to [the salary] you could get in industry. It makes a huge difference. *FE TRI claimant*

Other long-term outcomes

There is emerging evidence from interviews with FE TRI claimants and HR/SLT staff that short-term outcomes associated with the introduction of the payment are beginning to contribute to longer-term improvements in quality of provision and occupational health and wellbeing. For example:

- one HR/SLT interviewee reported that FE teachers appear more motivated since receiving the payment, which has improved staff retention. In turn, higher retention is contributing to reduced disruption to class timetables and more consistent teaching for students
- several FE TRI claimants interviewed perceived that the financial safety net provided by the payment has reduced stress associated by financial pressures. This reduction in stress has contributed to improved mental health, enabling teachers to focus more effectively on their teaching
- some FE TRI claimants described how they perceive the payment has increased the likelihood of them remaining in their role by improving their overall wellbeing. This included helping them feel more positive and improving their work-life balance, as the increase in their disposable income had enabled them to engage in enjoyable activities outside work.

I hadn't been on holiday for years and I was able to do it last year because of the TRI. *FE TRI claimant*

Findings to date suggest that the FE TRI is not yet contributing to a reduction in FE teachers' workloads. As set out in the preceding chapter, workload is a key barrier to teacher retention. Identifying a plausible pathway through which the payment could

support longer-term workforce stability will need further testing in the second year of the TBE.

Influence of pay on retention relative to other factors

FE TRI claimants and HR/SLT staff were asked what factors in addition to pay (including the FE TRI payment) contributed to retention issues by ranking 10 aspects of teaching in FE from the least (10th position) to the most rewarding (1st position). The rankings, together with insights from the interviews, demonstrate that a range of factors, in addition to pay, are associated with their decision to leave or remain in FE teaching and as such influence staff retention in the sector.

Least rewarding aspects of teaching in FE

Workload was ranked the least rewarding aspect of working in FE by both FE TRI claimants (33%) and HR/SLT staff (38%; n=24) (Table 3). A similar proportion of FE TRI claimants (16%) and HR/SLT staff (15%; n=9) ranked pay as the least rewarding aspect for teachers working in FE. However, while 17% of claimants regarded being valued and recognised in wider society as the least rewarding aspect, just 5% (n=3) of HR/SLT staff shared this view.

A comparison of the mean rankings of the most and least rewarding aspects for FE teachers of working in FE (where 1 is most rewarding and 10 is least rewarding), workload was again considered the least rewarding aspect by both FE TRI claimants (8.2) and HR/SLT staff (7.9; n=63) (Table 3).

Table 3: FE TRI claimants' and FE providers' ranking of rewarding aspects of working in FE (where 1 is most rewarding and 10 is least rewarding)

Rewarding aspects of working in FE	FE TRI claimant: mean ranking	FE TRI claimant: % ranking aspect in 10 th place	FE TRI claimant: number	HR/SLT staff: mean ranking	HR/SLT staff: % ranking aspect in 10 th place	HR/SLT staff: number
Workload	8.2	33%	(2,473)	7.9	38%	(63)
Value and recognition in wider society	6.8	17%	(2,472)	6.3	5%	(61)
Working hours	6.6	5%	(2,486)	6.3	8%	(61)
Pay (including the FE TRI payment)	6.4	16%	(2,510)	6.1	15%	(61)
Career development/opportunities for progression	6.1	8%	(2,482)	5.8	5%	(62)
Job security	5.6	5%	(2,493)	5.5	5%	(61)
Positive college working environment	4.9	4%	(2,520)	3.1	0%	(65)
Having the opportunity to teach a trade/vocation	4.2	6%	(2,534)	5.2	10%	(60)
Contributing to the talent pipeline for industry	4.1	4%	(2,537)	5.6	7%	(60)
Student achievement and making a positive difference to their lives	1.6	0%	(2,756)	1.9	0%	(69)

Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Drawing on your experience as an FE teacher, please rank the following about what you find the most and least rewarding about teaching in FE? (Bases vary – see each statement); HR/SLT survey – Please rank the following about what teachers find the most and least rewarding about working in your organisation (Bases vary – see each statement).

Statistically significant differences in the mean rankings of the most and least rewarding aspects by FE TRI claimant characteristics were identified:

- those who had previously worked in industry (8.5) were more likely to rank workload as less rewarding than those who previously worked in the public sector (7.6) or independent training providers (8.0)
- dual professionals (8.4) were more likely to rank workload as less rewarding than those who are not (8.1)
- those awarded the lowest FE TRI amount (£3,000 or less) (7.4) were more likely to rank pay as less rewarding than those who received £4,000-£5,000 (6.9) or £6,000 (6.3).

Statistically significant differences were also found in the mean rankings of the most and least rewarding aspects by FE provider characteristics. HR/SLT respondents from GFECs were more likely to rank workload as less rewarding than those from other providers²⁶ (a mean score of 8.5 compared with 6.9).

Several FE TRI claimants interviewed explained why workload was the least rewarding aspect of their role, characterising it as 'excessive', 'stressful' and a key driver for teachers leaving the sector. A couple of interviewees reported working beyond their contracted hours whilst some outlined a high volume of administrative tasks such as monitoring student attendance, data-related activities and meetings which limited the time they had available to focus on teaching.

Chasing parents and chasing attendance, and then putting it on the system, there's no time to even plan lessons. If I wanted to plan a lesson that would be in my own time because all the admin time is taken up with all the duties that you need to [do for] the role. *FE TRI claimant*

Interviews with HR/SLT staff also highlighted how workload has increased and acts a barrier to retaining FE teachers.

Teaching has completely changed over the years and there is a lot of administrative burden on teaching staff... it's a lot more holistic now than just going in and teaching your subject. It's obviously all the monitoring, the chasing up, the attendance, the parents' involvement and all of that. *HR/SLT staff member*

In addition to workload, HR/SLT interviewees reported further barriers to FE teacher retention. The expectation amongst FE providers for teachers to have or be willing to work towards a teaching qualification deters some (particularly older individuals reluctant

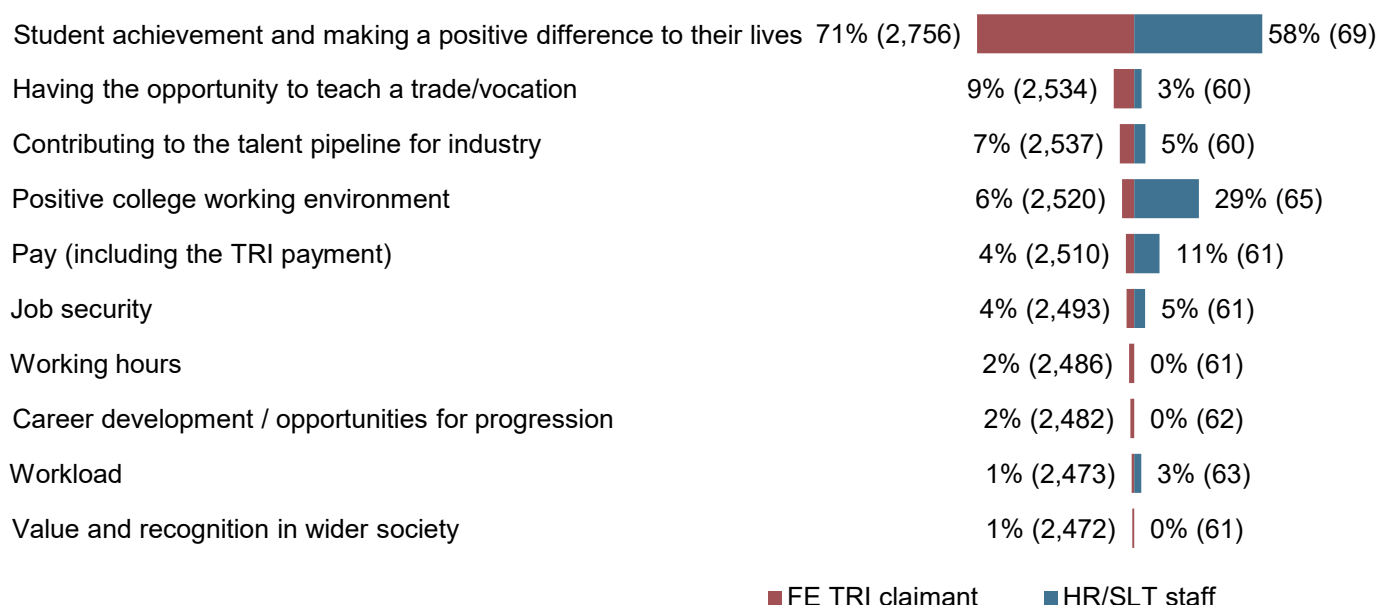
²⁶ 'Other providers' include: 16 to 19 only schools and academies, institutes for adult learning, and specialist FE colleges.

to return to study) from remaining in post. A couple of HR/SLT staff described large class sizes and challenging student behaviour as discouraging new recruits from industry from continuing to work in the FE sector.

Most rewarding aspects of teaching in FE

Almost three-quarters of FE TRI claimants (71%) and over half of the HR/SLT staff (58%; n=40) surveyed ranked student achievement and making a positive difference to their lives as the most rewarding part of working in the FE sector (Figure 12). In comparison, pay (including the FE TRI payment) is only ranked in first position by 4% of FE TRI claimants and 11% (n=7) of HR/SLT staff.

Figure 12: FE TRI claimants' and HR/SLT staff's perceptions of the most rewarding aspect of working in FE (proportion ranking aspect as 1 out of 10)



Source: FE TRI claimant survey – Drawing on your experience as an FE teacher, please rank the following about what you find the most and least rewarding about teaching in FE? (Bases vary – see each statement); HR/SLT survey – Please rank the following about what teachers find the most and least rewarding about working in your organisation (Bases vary – see each statement).

Most FE teachers interviewed perceived that making a meaningful difference to students' lives was more important than pay when choosing to work in the FE sector.

The most rewarding [aspect of being an FE teacher] will always be the student face-to-face experience, helping them improve, helping them feel successful, making them feel confident in themselves, that will always be the best thing for me about any sort of teaching job. *FE TRI claimant*

FE TRI claimants interviewed also conveyed that imparting vocational skills and experience to the next generation was an important motivation for some FE teachers to continue working in their roles.

The aspirational goal of putting something back in, passing on the skills to young people, taking part in something beyond my own self, and also [helping] the longevity of construction trade. *FE TRI claimant*

Other retention initiatives

Many HR/SLT staff and some FE TRI claimant interviewees identified a range of initiatives offered by FE providers in addition to the FE TRI that are also intended to support teacher retention. These initiatives aim to help teachers feel supported and valued, thereby reducing the likelihood of them leaving their role. These include:

- fully funded continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities including teaching qualifications, subject-specific training, leadership courses, and mentoring schemes
- flexible working options, such as working from home for lesson planning and marking
- mental health support, including access to on-site counselling services
- wellbeing support, for example, free yoga classes, an additional day of annual leave, free breakfast
- recognition schemes, for example, star of the month awards.

FE teacher claimant characteristics and outcomes

Early insight from the qualitative findings suggest that claimants' characteristics and circumstances may affect retention-related outcomes set out in the ToC. The payment appears to be more impactful for claimants who are at an earlier stage of their career and/or dependent on a single income. This initial insight from the qualitative research will be further explored in the second year of the evaluation.

The financial side of it is quite important to me, because I'm on my own, I have a mortgage, there's a lot of things that I have to deal with financially. *FE TRI claimant*

In contrast, FE TRI claimants who are more financially stable appear to place greater value on CPD opportunities than on the payment when considering the likelihood of remaining in their post. For these individuals, the opportunity to gain additional skills and

knowledge is a more influential factor, with the payment viewed as a 'nice to have' rather than a key driver. Again, this emerging finding will be investigated further in year 2.

The FE TRI was a financial benefit, whereas things like CPD and courses make me stay in the role, because it allows me different opportunities, gives me different ideas that I can put in [place], and I can be creative with it. *FE TRI claimant*

Unintended consequences of the FE TRI payment on retention

The year 1 qualitative research identifies several unintended consequences of the payment that could mitigate against the achievement of retention-related outcomes.

Lack of parity between eligible and ineligible FE teachers

Some HR/SLT interviewees suggested non-eligible FE teachers consider themselves less valued than their colleagues who are able to claim the FE TRI despite being equally committed and hardworking. They indicated this issue was particularly pertinent for long-serving FE teachers who felt their skills and experience were being overlooked whilst new entrants were being rewarded. This was perceived to be leading to resentment between colleagues which in turn was affecting working relationships:

You have staff that say, 'Well, it's not fair because I'm not a maths teacher or an engineering lecturer, but I'm equally committed, equally hard-working and passionate about what I do.' *HR/SLT staff member*

A few HR/SLT interviewees reported cases where the salaries of FE teachers with 10 years' experience were lower than early career teachers when the FE TRI was taken into account. One possible consequence of this perceived lack of parity could be increased attrition amongst more experienced teachers and teachers of other subjects. Loss of knowledge, skills and expertise could then exacerbate retention challenges for providers and potentially affect quality of provision. These issues will be further explored in year 2.

Risk of attrition when payments stop

Several HR/SLT interviewees expressed concerns about the potential impact on the retention of FE TRI claimants when the payments cease (after 5 years) or in the event the programme is discontinued. They fear that FE teachers who become accustomed to the additional income will perceive it as a pay cut when FE TRI payments end and leave the sector. A similar concern was raised by many FE TRI claimants who indicated that the loss of the payment would negatively impact their financial planning and job satisfaction. Some of these interviewees implied it would result in them seeking higher

paid roles elsewhere in the FE sector or in industry to maintain an equivalent level of income.

If they stop rolling [the TRI] out, it will be like a sudden pay cut... It makes you look elsewhere, and it makes you less likely to keep pushing through the hard times and those pinch points. *FE TRI claimant*

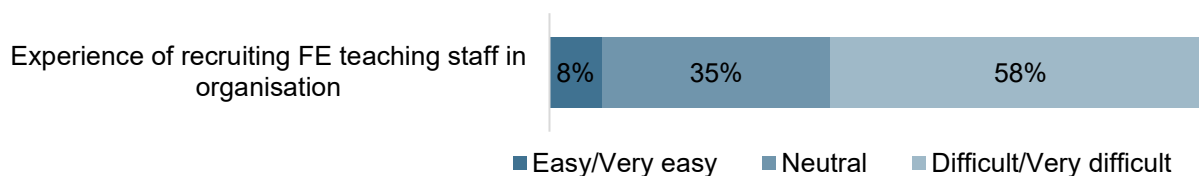
Chapter 5: FE recruitment challenges and impact of the TRI

This chapter presents emerging evidence on to the extent to which the FE TRI is contributing to the short-term outcome of increasing recruitment choices for FE TRI eligible subjects in providers with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students (RQ2), as set out in the ToC. While longer-term recruitment outcomes are beyond the scope of this interim report, the chapter explores tentative evidence on the payment's contribution to increased speed of recruitment, reduced recruitment-related operating costs, improved quality of recruited candidates, and reduced course closures resulting from staff shortages. This chapter also includes some evidence of unintended consequences of the FE TRI payment related to recruitment.

Current recruitment landscape

Nearly three-fifths (58%; n=50) of HR/SLT staff surveyed reported that they found it difficult/very difficult to *recruit* FE teaching staff. This is a larger proportion than the 36% (n=31) who found it difficult/very difficult to *retain* staff (Figure 13). Respondents from GFECs were significantly more likely to report that recruiting FE teaching staff was difficult/very difficult (72%; n=38) than respondents from other providers²⁷ (35%; n=12).

Figure 13: HR/SLT staff experience of recruiting FE teaching staff



Source: HR/SLT survey – Overall, in your organisation, how easy or difficult is it to recruit FE teaching staff? (Base=87).

Subjects experiencing recruitment issues

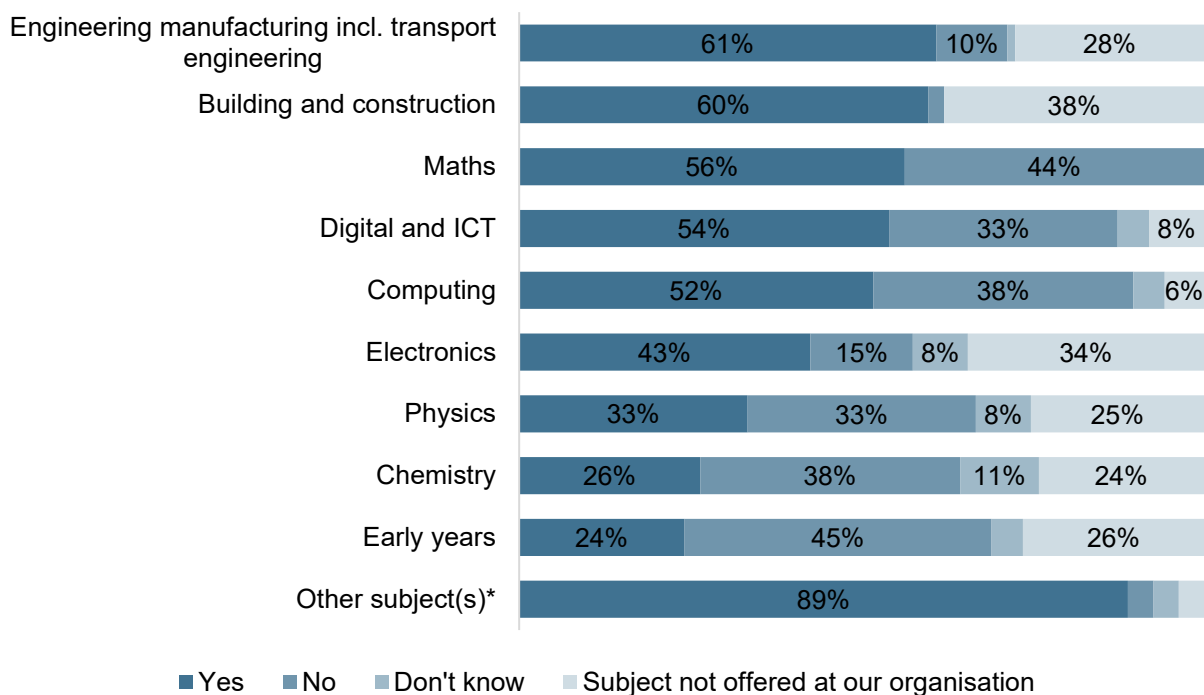
FE providers experience more recruitment than retention challenges for subjects targeted by the FE TRI payment (Figure 14)²⁸. More than half of HR/SLT staff surveyed experienced challenges recruiting for: engineering manufacturing (61%; n=53), building

²⁷ 'Other providers' include: 16 to 19 only schools and academies, institutes for adult learning, and specialist FE colleges.

²⁸ 24 respondents indicated they had retention issues with 'other' subjects. Of the 'other' subjects specified, the most frequent was business/economics (n=6).

and construction (60%; n=52), maths (56%; n=49), digital and ICT (54%; n=47), and computing (52%; n=45).

Figure 14: Subjects with which FE providers experience recruitment issues²⁹



Source: HR/SLT survey - Are you experiencing any recruitment issues in your organisation for any of the following subjects? (Base=87, except for other subject(s)=27).

Reflecting retention challenges, HR/SLT staff reported that recruitment challenges were most pronounced in engineering manufacturing (27%; n=21), followed by building and construction (23%; n=18).³⁰ This finding was echoed in interviews with HR/SLT staff who also identified construction and engineering, particularly electrical engineering, as the subjects where they experienced the greatest recruitment difficulties. Fewer HR/SLT survey respondents identified experiencing most recruitment challenges with maths (7%; n=5) and chemistry (3%; n=2) whilst no respondents reported that the most severe challenges were in physics or early years.

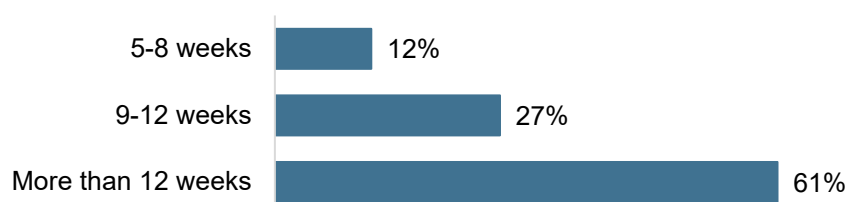
²⁹ The subject categories employed in the survey reflect those used in the FEWDC. However, these differ to those used in the FE TRI guidance, specifically computing (including digital and ICT) and engineering and manufacturing (including transport engineering and electronics).

³⁰ HR/SLT survey question: From the subjects that you selected, which one is your organisation experiencing the most recruitment issues with? (Base=77)

Time to recruit staff

Three-fifths of HR/SLT (61%; n=47) survey respondents reported that, on average, it took more than 3 months to recruit staff for the subjects in which they experienced the greatest recruitment difficulties (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Average length of time it takes FE providers to recruit teachers in the subject in which they experience most recruitment issues



Source: HR/SLT survey – Please indicate the average length of time it takes your organisation to recruit an FE teacher in [most challenging subject]. (Base=77).

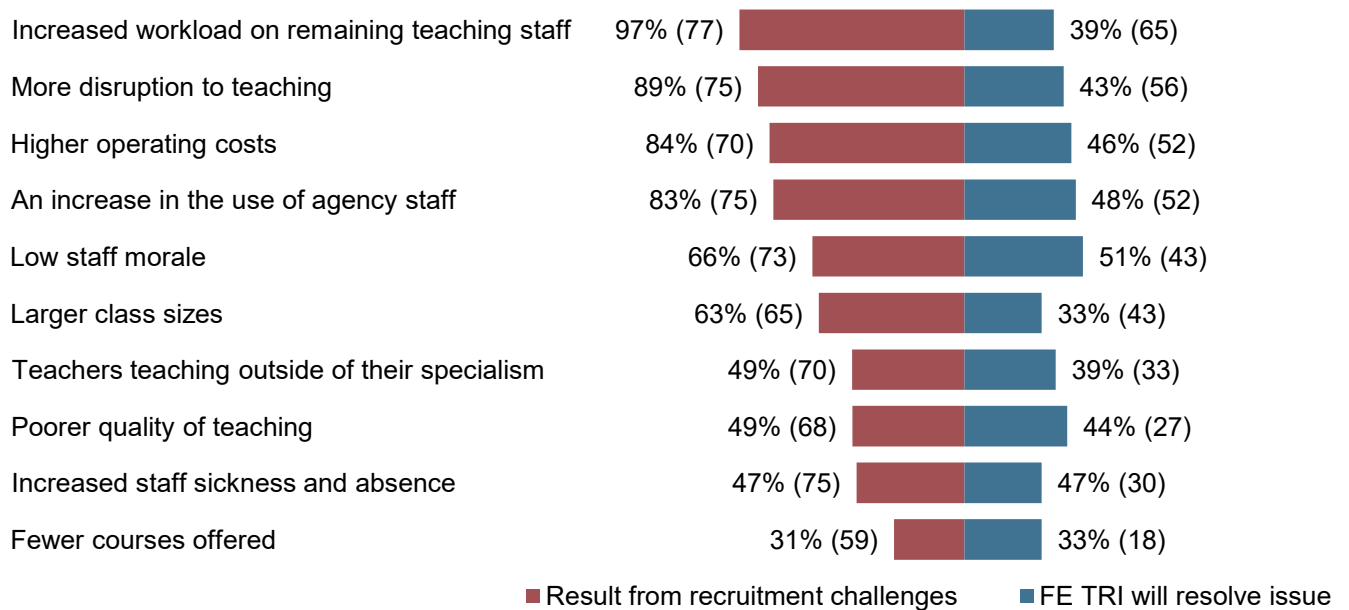
Several HR/SLT interviewees indicated that they had undertaken multiple recruitment cycles to fill some vacancies, in particular for FE teachers in STEM subjects. A few of them had unfilled vacancies for over a year, particularly for electrical engineering lecturers. The prolonged recruitment period was perceived to disrupt continuity and the quality of teaching, as well as the learning experience for students.

To recruit into a STEM role, that could probably take us maybe 6 months plus, to get somebody through the door, at which point we're hiring agencies, we've got people covering classes and doing more teaching hours. *HR/SLT staff member*

Impact of recruitment issues on providers

HR/SLT survey findings indicated that recruitment issues have a similar impact on statutory FE providers as those related to retention (increased workload on remaining teaching staff, more disruption to teaching, higher operating costs, and an increase in the use of agency staff). The top four impacts of recruitment issues mirrored the top 4 impacts of retention issues (although the third and fourth statement are in reverse order) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Proportion of HR/SLT staff who agree/strongly agree factors result from recruitment challenges and that the FE TRI will help resolve them



Source: HR/SLT survey – To what extent do you agree or disagree that FE teacher recruitment challenges in your organisation have resulted in... (Bases vary – see each statement); HR/SLT survey - To what extent do you agree or disagree that the FE TRI payment will help to resolve the following recruitment issues in your organisation? (Base sizes vary).

A statistically significant higher proportion of HR/SLT survey respondents from GFECs than other providers³¹ agreed/strongly agreed that FE teacher recruitment challenges have resulted in: an increased use of agency staff (89% (n=47) compared with 68% (n=15)) and increased staff sickness and absence (59% (n=30) compared with 21% (n=5)).

Recruitment issues were reported to result in higher operation costs (84% (n=59) of HR/SLT respondents agreed/strongly agreed this was an impact). Insight from the HR/SLT interviews highlighted that reliance on recruitment agencies to identify suitable candidates was a key driver of increased costs, as providers incur agency fees. The use of agencies can also lead to longer recruitment timelines; once agencies have identified potential candidates, FE providers then need to conduct eligibility checks and interviews. According to interviewees, this results in protracted periods of time without consistent teaching provision for students.

HR/SLT staff surveyed were less likely to agree/strongly agree that the FE TRI will help resolve a range of recruitment issues than retention issues (Figure 16 and Figure 4). In

³¹ 'Other providers' include: 16 to 19 only schools and academies, institutes for adult learning, and specialist FE colleges.

particular, larger class sizes (33% (n=13) compared with 44% (n=12)), increased workload on remaining teaching staff (39% (n=25) compared with 50% (n=22)), higher operating costs (46% (n=24) compared with 57% (n=21)), and low staff morale (51% (n=22) compared with 62% (n=19)).

Reasons for recruitment challenges

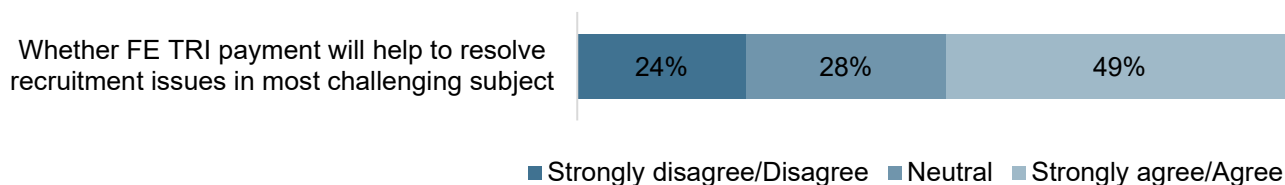
Interview findings indicated that low pay is the principal (but not sole) barrier for FE providers seeking to recruit teachers to the sector. Most HR/SLT interviewees identified the disparity in pay between FE teaching and similar roles in schools or industry as the greatest barrier to recruitment.

The staff that we've got would earn significantly more in industry than they do with us. In construction, for example, my biggest challenge is to recruit electrical members of staff. They're on probably about £37,000, £39,000. In industry, they would probably be on double that salary.

HR/SLT staff member

A similar proportion of HR/SLT staff surveyed agreed/strongly agreed (49%; n=35) the FE TRI payment will help to resolve recruitment issues as retention issues (51%; n=28) in their most challenging subject. However, one-quarter disagreed/strongly disagreed (24%; n=17) suggesting that other factors also influence recruitment issues (Figure 17).

Figure 17: HR/SLT staff's views about the influence of FE TRI payment on recruitment issues



Source: HR/SLT survey – To what extent do you agree or disagree that the FE TRI payment will help to resolve recruitment issues in [most difficult subject to retain] (Base = 72).

HR/SLT interviewees identified that a lack of candidates with relevant knowledge and specialist skills also affects recruitment. This is a particular issue for subjects that require up to date expertise, and where there is high demand from industry, for instance, computing, digital, electrical engineering and construction. Negative perceptions about working in the FE sector pose a further barrier. For example, workload, student behaviour, and restrictive working arrangements (such as fewer working from home opportunities and inflexible holidays) are perceived to deter potential recruits.

Emerging outcomes of FE TRI on teacher recruitment

Short-term outcomes

To date, evidence of the FE TRI achieving the short-term recruitment outcome of increasing the candidate pool for FE TRI eligible subjects is limited to a couple of HR/SLT interviewees. One of these interviewees reported that they had received more applications from industry professionals in engineering and electrical installation since the FE TRI was introduced and another has received more applications from candidates who had previously worked in construction (as well as engineering). These interviewees suggested the FE TRI had led to the increased candidate pool because it helped to narrow the pay gap between the FE sector and industry, therefore making it more attractive.

A couple of FE TRI claimants interviewed who had until recently worked in construction or electrical industries explained how the scheme had made FE teaching more financially viable, which encouraged them to apply.

It would have been a touch-and-go situation without the incentive, the actual basic salary here is quite derisory for the skills I have. My base salary is something I was earning when I was 25. *FE TRI claimant*

Long-term outcomes

There is no evidence as yet that the FE TRI payment contributes to recruitment-related long-term outcomes (increase in speed of recruitment, reduction in operating costs associated with recruitment and retention, increase in the quality of recruited candidates, or reduction of course closures due to staff shortages). The HR/SLT interviews provided insight into the reasons for the limited impact of the payment. First, the payment has predominantly been used as a retention tool rather than a recruitment method. This is likely due to branding the payment as a retention method. Second, FE TRI is accessible to a wide range of statutory FE providers, which prevents providers using it as a unique recruitment method for their organisation.

Would I say it made us more attractive, yes, but if everybody's doing it then it's the same. So, do I think it had an impact on our recruitment this year? No, probably not. *HR/SLT staff member*

Factors other than FE TRI influencing recruitment

The research findings suggest that some FE providers used their own methods to address recruitment challenges. These include their own financial initiatives and promotion of the benefits of working in the FE sector.

FE provider financial initiatives

Nearly one-quarter (23%) of providers represented in the HR/SLT survey offered or planned to offer recruitment incentives in the 2025 to 2026 academic year.³² A couple of HR/SLT interviewees described the financial incentives they currently or previously offered. For example, one FE provider previously offered £5,000 to recruit construction candidates but stopped this following the introduction of the FE TRI. Salary supplements to meet labour market salaries for FE teachers in high demand subjects such as construction, engineering, and electronics are also offered by some providers. HR/SLT interviewees suggested they were unable to compare the effectiveness of their own financial incentives with the FE TRI payment yet, as the latter had only recently been introduced. This is an area for the TBE to explore further in its second year.

Specifically for electrical delivery staff, we introduced what we called an industry rate allowance, so that's an additional responsibility like a skills supplement, so we had to do that to secure talent. *HR/SLT staff member*

Some HR/SLT interviewees also reported using financial rewards for existing FE staff who refer appropriate candidates for teaching positions.

Perceived advantages of working in the FE sector

Some HR/SLT interviewees described promoting the benefits of working in the FE sector, such as the pension and holiday entitlement, to attract candidates that work in industry. Interviewees indicated that vocational subjects, such as construction, sometimes attract applicants who are approaching the end of their career who want to give back to society by passing on their skills to the next generation. These candidates are typically motivated by a supportive working culture and opportunity for a better work-life balance than the financial return.

Unintended consequences of the FE TRI payment on recruitment

A few HR/SLT interviewees reported unease that the FE TRI payment could attract FE teachers from outside the sector who then leave once they receive it. One HR/SLT interviewee claimed one of their FE teachers had left their role after receiving the payment. Some HR/SLT interviewees suggested DfE should introduce a payback clause and/or staged payments to mitigate this risk.

³² HR/SLT survey question: Are you currently offering or considering offering other recruitment financial incentives such as golden hellos for the next academic year (2025/26)? (Base=77)

As identified earlier in the report, some HR/SLT interviewees suggested providers are more likely to promote the FE TRI to retain existing teachers rather than recruit prospective teachers. This is because they inferred from the name of the programme that its purpose was to support staff retention. Furthermore, HR/SLT interviewees reported there was insufficient lead in time in year one of the programme for providers to incorporate information about the FE TRI into their recruitment materials.

Chapter 6: Emerging insights and considerations

This chapter summarises the key insights from the first year of the TBE into the retention and recruitment challenges in the FE sector, the reach of the TRI, and progress towards the programme outcomes in the ToC. Considerations for the elements of the ToC which require further testing during the second year of the evaluation and additional topics to be explored in the fieldwork are also set out.

Current retention and recruitment challenges in FE

The evaluation demonstrates that retention and recruitment challenges are particularly acute in vocational and high-demand STEM subjects such as building and construction, engineering and manufacturing, and maths. The propensity for early career teachers to exit the FE sector in the first or second year of their career creates instability which, along with teacher shortages and persistent vacancy rates, has led to increased workloads, disruption to teaching and higher operating costs, in part as a result of the increased use of agency staff. While FE teachers in STEM subjects are largely satisfied in their job and feel rewarded by the opportunities teaching presents to develop the next generation of talent, many are considering leaving their roles. Increased workload, along with the disparity in pay between FE teaching and similar roles in schools and industry, are key drivers for those considering leaving the sector and are also perceived as a primary barrier to recruitment. The FE TRI is seeking to mitigate some of the financial and wider barriers by improving the overall remuneration package for early career teachers and increasing their sense of worth. However, the impact of the payment on retention and recruitment (and quality of provision in the longer term) could be limited unless it is accompanied by wider improvements to teachers' overall pay, terms and working conditions.

Programme reach

The FE TRI has achieved wide reach during its first year and has been implemented efficiently with minimal administrative burden. The majority of providers in the statutory sector have actively promoted the payment to their existing staff to support retention; subsequently take-up has been strong. However, confusion amongst providers about the purpose of the FE TRI, and the timing of the application window, particularly for round 2, has limited its use as a recruitment incentive.

Progress towards the outcomes in the ToC

Although it is still too early to say definitively what the impact of the FE TRI on FE teacher retention and recruitment has been, there is emerging evidence from providers and claimants that progress towards these outcomes is being achieved.

Those in receipt of the payment are more likely to perceive that their salary is fair and comparable to those undertaking similar roles for other employers. Claimants also report improvements in their financial and wider wellbeing as a result of the additional income, which helps them to not only meet rising living costs but also engage in activities they might not otherwise be able to afford. As pay is shown to be a key driver of attrition, shifting perceptions is likely to be a mechanism of change which contributes to increased retention in the longer term. Indeed, many claimants who expressed their intention to remain in FE teaching report that the FE TRI had at least some impact on their decision. This reported reduction in the attrition rate should be treated with caution as the survey is not representative of all FE teachers and respondents completed the survey after receiving confirmation their claim had been approved so could be biased. The QED will examine the impact of the FE TRI on teacher retention further.

There is a risk when the FE TRI payments cease, that the reduction in income creates an additional barrier to retention by leading claimants (now with up to 5 years' experience) to seek better paid roles elsewhere. Furthermore, an unintended consequence of the scheme is that it has created a lack of parity between teachers of different subjects and between teachers within the same department with different years of experience. There is a risk that this will lead to feelings of resentment and a sense among ineligible staff that they are less valued. A possible consequence of this is a rise in the rate of attrition among more experienced staff and/or teachers of non-priority subjects.

There is further emerging evidence to suggest that the payment has contributed towards other short-term retention outcomes. Teachers report feeling more valued which, in turn, is perceived to be having a positive impact on their morale, motivation and overall job satisfaction. As a result, some express a stronger inclination to remain in FE teaching. There are some early indications that the government's investment in FE could be enhancing the public image of the sector and raising the profile of FE teachers and the important role they fulfil. This is perceived to also be contributing to a greater sense of recognition amongst teachers, from both providers and wider society. These initial signs will be explored further in the second year of the evaluation.

There is some tentative evidence of progress towards other long-term outcomes, including improved quality of provision and better occupational health and wellbeing. However, there is no evidence as yet linking the payment to reduced workload.

Evidence that the FE TRI is making progress towards the anticipated recruitment outcomes is much more limited. This is primarily explained by its lack of use to date as a recruitment tool by providers. The universal reach of the scheme into the statutory FE sector could limit its impact as a recruitment incentive that encourages applicants to select one provider (that is experiencing severe staff shortages) over another (that is not).

How contextual factors are affecting outcomes

The evidence suggests that the influence of the payment on teachers' future career intentions varies according to background and characteristics. In particular, dual professionals, those who have previously worked in industry and those who teach apprenticeships appear to place greater value on the payment than their peers, particularly those who have taught in FE longer who are dissatisfied in their role and are considering leaving the profession. Attrition among longer serving teachers is likely to be a contextual factor that limits the impact of the FE TRI on its longer-term aim to improve teaching quality as their expert knowledge and experience is lost to the sector.

Claimants awarded higher FE TRI amounts view their pay more positively than other FE teachers which suggests that the maximum award of £6,000 is more impactful than lower amounts. There is qualitative evidence that the payment may be more impactful for retaining FE teachers who are at the earliest stage of their career and in less financially stable situations.

The evaluation has highlighted a range of other measures being implemented by providers to address retention and recruitment challenges. These include funded CPD, staff wellbeing schemes and financial incentives (typically for specific subjects). Providers also promote the benefits of working in the sector, including the pension scheme and holiday entitlements to attract new recruits. At this stage, it is not possible to discern the relative contribution of these schemes and the FE TRI on retention or recruitment outcomes, however this will be further explored in year 2.

Next steps for the evaluation

The first year of the evaluation has produced some emerging evidence on the FE TRI's impact on FE teacher retention and recruitment as well as insight into the mechanisms of change. In the second year, there will be an opportunity to further test elements of the ToC by addressing limitations and gaps in the current evidence base through further primary research and the QED. [Appendix 3](#) outlines key evidence gaps to be addressed and the methods for data collection.

Appendix 1: Survey and case study samples

HR/SLT survey sample and respondents

Table 4: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by type of FE provider

Type of FE provider	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
GFEC	156	58%	53	61%
SFC	38	14%	17	20%
16 to 19 academy converter	31	12%	8	9%
16 to 19 free school	27	10%	5	6%
Specialist FE college	12	5%	4	5%
Institute for adult learning	3	1%	0	0%
16 to 19 academy sponsor led	2	1%	0	0%
Total	269	100%	87	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

Table 5: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by number of teachers in receipt of FE TRI

Number of teachers in receipt of TRI	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Above average (>22)	97	43%	40	46%
Average or below average (<=22)	130	57%	47	54%
Total	227	100%	87	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

Table 6: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by proportion of students attracting disadvantage funding for 16 to 19 education

Proportion of students attracting disadvantage funding for 16 to 19 education	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Below 25%	26	10%	8	9%
Between 25 and 50%	45	17%	16	19%
50% and above	197	74%	62	72%
Total	268	100%	86	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

Table 7: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by FE provider size (number of FTE teachers)

Provider size (number of FTE teachers)	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Above average	97	43%	31	41%
Average or below average	130	57%	45	59%
Total	227	100%	76	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

Table 8: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by region

Region	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
East Midlands	17	6%	10	12%
East of England	28	10%	9	10%
London	40	15%	7	8%
North East	15	6%	7	8%
North West	49	18%	12	14%
South East	37	9%	15	17%
South West	24	11%	8	9%
West Midlands	29	11%	9	10%
Yorkshire and the Humber	30	11%	10	12%
Total	269	100%	87	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

Table 9: Profile of HR/SLT survey sample and responses by Ofsted rating

Ofsted rating	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Outstanding	70	26%	20	23%
Good	158	59%	52	60%
Requires improvement	29	11%	10	11%
Inadequate	1	0.4%	1	1%
No inspection	11	4%	4	5%
Total	269	100%	87	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and HR/SLT survey responses.

FE TRI claimant survey sample and respondents

Table 10: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by FE TRI award amount

FE TRI award amount	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
£2,000	17	0.3%	5	0.2%
£2,500	37	0.6%	18	1%
£3,000	313	5%	127	4%
£4,000	142	2%	72	2%
£5,000	497	8%	263	9%
£6,000	5,013	83%	2,458	84%
Total	6,019	100%	2,943	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and FE TRI claimant survey responses.

Table 11: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by subject taught

Subject taught	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Building/Construction	1,811	29%	886	29%
Chemistry	241	4%	116	4%
Computing	687	11%	300	10%
Early years	527	8%	270	9%
Engineering/Manufacturing	1,355	21%	693	22%
Maths	1,518	24%	725	23%
Physics	214	3%	110	4%
Total	6,353	100%	3,100	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and FE TRI claimant survey responses.

Table 12: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by qualification level taught

Qualification level taught	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
A-level	307	4%	155	4%
Apprenticeship	1,291	16%	650	17%
EYQ	288	4%	139	4%
GCSE	1,329	17%	651	17%
Level 3	3,033	38%	1,466	38%
T-level	1,390	18%	688	18%
Other (Digital Skills, International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) level 1/2, IBO level 3, Level 2)	269	3%	143	4%
Total	7,907	100%	3,892	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and FE TRI claimant survey responses.

Table 13: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by whether hold a teaching qualification

Whether hold a teaching qualification	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Yes	1,872	64%
Not yet	402	14%
No, but planned	669	23%
Total	2,943	100%

Source: FE TRI claimant survey responses. *Only asked of survey respondents.

Table 14: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by whether they are a dual professional

Whether a dual professional*	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
Yes	298	11%
No	2,451	89%
Total	2,749	100%

Source: FE TRI claimant survey responses. *Only asked of survey respondents.

Table 15: Profile of FE TRI claimant survey sample and responses by year started teaching in FE

Year started teaching in FE	Survey sample: Frequency	Survey sample: Percent	Survey responses: Frequency	Survey responses: Percent
2020	687	11%	323	11%
2021	938	16%	460	16%
2022	1,222	20%	616	21%
2023	1,605	26%	802	27%
2024	1,567	26%	742	25%
Total	6,109	100%	2,943	100%

Source: DfE MD at time of survey dissemination in June 2025 and FE TRI claimant survey responses.

Qualitative interview sample

Table 16: Number of interviews conducted per FE provider

FE provider code	Number of paired HR/SLT paired interviews	Number of FE claimant interviews
1	1	4
2	1	2
3	1	3
4	1	2
5	1	4
6	1	4
7	1	2
8	1	2
Total	8	23

Source: Interview sample

Table 17: Characteristics of FE providers at which interviews conducted

FE provider characteristics	Number of FE providers
Teachers in receipt of TRI	
0-10	2
11-50	4
51+	2
Proportion of FE teachers who are dual professionals	
0%	3
1-10%	2
11-20%	3
Proportion of students attracting disadvantage funding for 16 to 19 education	
Between 25-50%	1
50% and above	7
Type of provider	
GFEC	6
SFC	1
16-19 free school	1
Region	
East Midlands	2
London	1
North West	3
South East	2
Ofsted grade	
Outstanding	1
Good	5
Requires improvement	2

Source: Interview sample

Appendix 2: Focus of the data collection in year 2

Table 18: Areas of ToC to review or test further in year 2

Element and statement	Evidence to date	Next steps for TBE
Outcomes		
Retention longer-term outcomes: reduction in teacher workload; improved quality of provision	None; limited	Explore further in year 2
Recruitment short-term outcome: increase in recruitment choices for FE TRI eligible subjects in providers with a higher proportion of disadvantaged students	Limited	Explore further in year 2
Recruitment longer-term outcomes: increase in speed of recruitment; reduction in operating costs; increase in quality of recruited candidates; reduction of course closures due to staff shortages	None	Explore further in year 2
Quality of provision	Uncertainty about change mechanism	Emerging evidence suggests that this is related to FE teacher recruitment (ability to recruit teachers with skills in shortage subjects leads to better quality of knowledge being passed onto students) in addition to tentative signs for higher retention. Year 2 fieldwork will test this further
Change mechanism		
(Recruitment) Government investment in FE sector demonstrates sector is valued and improves public image of working in the sector and that FE teaching is a financially viable career	None	Seek further evidence in year 2 that supports recruitment, or change as there is some evidence that this relates to retention
Assumptions		
Payment attracts new teachers into the sector, including those from industry	Limited	Explore further in year 2
Payment leads to more talent entering the profession	Limited	Explore further in year 2
Unintended outcomes		
Negative impact on non-eligible teachers (i.e. teachers that teach other subjects) and teachers that have been in the profession beyond 5-years	Limited	Explore further in year 2
Impacts on non-statutory FE providers i.e. create gaps in provision	Not explored	Research and Analysis Pipeline (RAP) survey and year 2

Themes to explore in year 2 fieldwork

HR/SLT

Surveys

Remove survey questions about the challenges of working in the FE sector to enable questions to be added about:

- the extent to which the payment has been used as a retention and recruitment incentive
- the impact of the payment on short- and longer-term retention and recruitment outcomes and where it has been the most impactful (including on the cost of using recruitment agencies)
- how the FE TRI compares to other retention and recruitment incentives
- the impact of contextual and other factors on outcomes

Interviews and case studies

- Remove/reduce questions about current barriers to focus more on short/long-term outcomes and the change mechanisms. The advisory group recommended exploring how FE providers have managed the impact of the payment for claimants when Ofsted encourage providers to support the wellbeing of all staff.
- Assess knowledge about eligibility criteria and views about any changes to communications/website/timing of annual confirmation of scheme's continuation /application window.
- Gain further insight about the extent to which the FE TRI ToC logic stands for recruitment (and the profile of FE teachers most likely to be attracted by the payment).
- Explore other financial and non-financial recruitment/retention incentives that providers offer (and whether use of these has changed since the TRI's introduction) and the extent to which these are more/less effective than the TRI.

FE TRI Claimants

Surveys

Remove survey questions about the challenges of working in the FE sector. Add questions about:

- the impact of the FE TRI on short- (e.g. financial wellbeing) and longer-term outcomes (e.g. reduced workload). To understand the strength of impact, we propose asking respondents to indicate the most impactful outcome
- other factors that contribute to the outcomes

- what, if anything, would encourage those planning to leave the FE sector to stay including higher FE TRI payment amount
- the impact of the payment discontinuing on decisions to stay in FE teaching.

Qualitative findings suggest those intending to leave are most likely to move to another FE provider. We propose adding an additional survey option to the destination question for those planning to leave their job to identify how many are considering moving to another FE provider.

The advisory group would like us to identify how many FE TRI claimants have moved into industry and then back into the FE sector, as well as their motivations for leaving and returning. This is likely to be a small number of respondents, but we can include a survey option to identify individuals and try to follow-up via the interviews.

Interviews and case studies

Some interviews will be targeted at those who have been recently recruited into post to and those that are considering leaving.

HR/SLT and FE teachers

Interview target audiences at non-statutory providers i.e. not eligible to access the FE TRI to understand whether the payment has had any positive or negative outcomes on staff retention and recruitment.



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