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## TEACHERS' CAREERS: THE IMPACT OF AGE, DISABILITY, ETHNICITY, GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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*Janet Powney, Valerie Wilson, Stuart Hall, Julia Davidson, Susan Kirk, Sheila Edward*  
*SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow,*  
*in conjunction with*  
*Heidi Safia Mirza, CRES, Middlesex University*

### Introduction

Teachers are a diverse professional group, the members of which are differentiated by a number of characteristics (GTCE/Guardian/Mori, 2003). This report presents results from a 12-month study of teachers' career progress and the ways in which headteachers, teachers, school governors and others perceive that age, disability, ethnicity, gender and to a limited extent sexual orientation impact on teachers' careers. The research was funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), and undertaken by the Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE) Centre, University of Glasgow in conjunction with Middlesex University between January 2002 and April 2003.

### Key Findings

- Teachers' motives for entering teaching appear to be more related to personal circumstances and ambition than age, disability, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.
- Few teachers in the study have a developed concept of a 'career' but many reported that they were attracted to teaching because it offered them the potential of job satisfaction.
- Teachers' career choices appear to be influenced by their experiences in the profession and by local and government policies at the time of making decisions. These are perceived to be more important than age, disability, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation.
- Many white male teachers thought that teachers are promoted according to their experience and ability. In contrast, female teachers, teachers with disabilities and teachers from minority ethnic groups are more likely to think that age, disability, ethnicity or gender has affected their career progression.
- Most respondents with disabilities reported experiencing difficulties both in entering and in making progress in the profession.
- Members of minority ethnic groups were more likely to seek promotion than other groups of teachers. Many also believed that they have not received promotion commensurate with their qualifications and experience.
- Respondents perceived their age as either an advantage or a disadvantage depending on the stage they had reached in their careers: older teachers believed that appointment panels may prefer 'younger, more energetic' applicants, and younger women from minority ethnic groups believed that they may be advantaged in certain circumstances.
- 22% of survey respondents regarded sexual orientation to be of some importance in promotion prospects. However none of the case study informants reported that their careers had been adversely affected by their sexual orientation.
- Some groups of teachers, i.e. part-time and supply staff, reported experiencing problems accessing continuing professional development (CPD) and promotion. These groups are predominantly female.

- Family circumstances, rather than gender per se, appear to be associated with the career progression of female teachers.
- Although most teachers surveyed were satisfied with their careers, 54% had thought about leaving the profession during the past year. However, few teachers reported having access to careers advice and many respondents admitted that they knew little about alternative careers.
- Teachers identified a variety of factors which have helped them in their careers. These include receiving appropriate information, positive school ethos, supportive headteachers, enthusiastic and understanding colleagues, and adequate equipment or adaptations.
- Respondents suggested a number of ways in which equality of opportunities for teachers' careers could be improved. These include: knowledge of equal opportunities - particularly amongst headteachers, governors and appointment panels, more careers information, flexible employment contracts and working arrangements, access to CPD, a reduction in paperwork generally, recognition of teachers' skills and knowledge, positive feedback, and more adaptations and support workers within the classroom for teachers with disabilities

### **The Context**

An analysis of published statistical information (DfES, 2003; GTCE, 2002) and previous research indicates that members of the teaching profession are differentiated by their age, gender and ethnicity. Women predominate: they form 69% of the teachers in the maintained sector, compared to 31% males. Men under 30 make up just over 4% of full-time staff in maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools (DfES, 2003). The majority of these younger males are in the secondary sector. Women are under-represented in management positions. This is particularly true in the secondary sector where only 31% of secondary heads are female (DfES, 2003). However, young women below 35 who are deputy heads in secondary schools are more likely to earn more than male deputy heads (DfES, 2003). The number of female Asian teachers is increasing in the primary sector (McCreith & Ross, 2002). Very experienced white teachers with 15 years or more teaching experience have about a one in five chance of being a headteacher, whereas the proportion is significantly less for black and Asian teachers (McCreith & Ross,

2002). The estimates of the number of teachers with disabilities in the profession vary from 0.05% (GTCE, 2002) to 1% (NUT, 2001).

### **Aims and methodology**

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of the main variables of age, disability, ethnicity, gender and, to a certain extent, sexual orientation on teachers' career profiles. Information was gathered from a postal survey of 2158 teachers drawn from a sample of 62 LEAs in England and interviews with 109 teachers and 14 governors in 18 case study schools. To complement the two main sources of data, a series of workshop discussion groups were held: two with minority ethnic teachers, one with the National Union of Teachers (NUT) teachers with disabilities group, two with minority ethnic teachers' groups at the NUT's annual conference and two groups attending the NUT conference on Girls' and Boys' Achievements. In addition, a top-up survey of teachers with disabilities was conducted through contact with the British Association of Teachers of the Deaf (BATOD) and the Association of Blind and Partially Sighted Teachers (ABAPTAS). The findings from all sources are reported below.

### **Findings from the study**

#### ***Entry into the profession***

There are now numerous routes into teaching; however, teachers in this study selected their routes to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) on the basis of it being the main or only route at the time they trained. Six per cent (6%) of survey respondents (especially teachers from minority ethnic groups) and 40% of lone parent teachers chose a route that fitted their family circumstances. Teachers qualifying in black Commonwealth countries reported more difficulty in gaining QTS than those from the rest of Europe and white Commonwealth countries. All teachers' career choices are heavily influenced by their parental status, by contemporary teacher supply and policies, and by housing and other costs of living. From the survey, minority ethnic teachers are most likely to work in secondary schools, whereas part-time teachers are predominantly women who work in primary and special schools. Forty-four per cent (44%) of minority ethnic teachers in the sample are under 35 compared to 28% of white teachers. A higher proportion of teachers with disabilities than teachers without disabilities in the survey work part-time.

### ***Job satisfaction***

The survey showed that most teachers are satisfied with their careers (80% per cent of white female and 75% of white male survey respondents were either fairly or completely satisfied in their job, compared to 69% of minority ethnic females and 70% of minority ethnic males). White teachers without disabilities report having warmer relationships with their colleagues than teachers with disabilities and those from minority ethnic teachers' groups. Despite these high levels of satisfaction, over half the respondents had contemplated leaving the profession in the previous year for reasons such as heavy workload (74%), too much paper work (68%), stress of teaching (66%), and long working hours (60%). Teachers with disabilities were more likely than other groups to think about leaving the profession (72% of teachers with disabilities, compared to 54% of other teachers, had considered leaving the profession).

### ***Teachers' career aspirations***

Minority ethnic male and female teachers of all ages are more motivated than their white counterparts to seek promotion. Seven per cent (7%) of minority ethnic teachers compared to 4% of white teachers indicated that they would seek promotion at all opportunities. Older teachers, part-time, job-share and teachers with disabilities were most likely to indicate that they would struggle with increased responsibility. Many teachers who were interviewed suggested that their career aspirations are tempered by what they see as the desirable home/work balance as well as by their age and their current post.

### ***Factors influencing career choice***

For a number of case study informants, being in the right place at the right time could be a factor in determining opportunities. This may disadvantage some, who may lack access to influential networks. Respondents suggested that some minority ethnic students may not get ITT placements that subsequently lead to good job opportunities. Case study informants thought that access to CPD influenced teachers' careers by increasing their motivation for promotion and demonstrating their commitment to the profession. Some minority ethnic informants report being discouraged by their headteachers from developing their careers, and informants with disabilities think that their special needs are often ignored by INSET providers. Family circumstances can take priority when teachers are contemplating changing their jobs. Women of all ages and backgrounds usually take the major responsibility for childcare and their partner's career tends to take priority. One in twenty survey respondents is a lone

parent, with almost all teaching full time.

### ***Who gets promoted?***

The survey suggests that gender and ethnicity (defined in this study as members of white or minority ethnic groups including Asian, Black, Chinese, other minority ethnic or mixed groups) are associated with promotion. Significantly more male than female survey respondents hold senior management or promoted posts (62% of secondary school headteachers and 39% of primary schools headteachers are male). In some circumstances being black or black and female is perceived as a possible career advantage. Over half the minority ethnic male and female respondents are classroom teachers compared to 29% and 35% respectively of white males and females, including teachers from white British, Irish and other white groups. Twelve per cent (12%) of white male respondents under the age of 45 are in promoted posts compared to only 5% of minority ethnic teachers. Female teachers' personal and family lives are associated with their choice to pursue promotion and career development. Female headteachers are significantly less likely than male headteachers to live with a partner or to have children. Thirty-two per cent (32%) of white female headteachers live alone compared to just 2% of the comparable males. There are few headteachers from minority ethnic groups or with disabilities.

### ***Career support received***

Respondents identified a number of ways in which their careers have been supported. Most interviewees reported that schools have equal opportunities policies, but practices vary. Most interviewees were in agreement that the nature of LEA support has changed since management and budgets were devolved to schools. LEAs are perceived to be less proactive in supporting teachers' careers, but some offer advice, courses and programmes for teachers employed in local schools. Headteachers offer crucial direct career support for teachers by offering encouragement, valuing contributions and supporting CPD.

### ***Which groups think they are disadvantaged?***

Various groups reported factors that they believed had disadvantaged their career progression. These included being a mature entrant to teaching, being from a minority ethnic group, having disabilities, and working in a situation other than a full-time permanent school post (i.e. part-time, supply, peripatetic and Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) teaching). We believe that individuals who fall into more than one of these groups may suffer double or multiple

disadvantages. There were few teachers from minority ethnic groups in our case study schools, even in schools with a high proportion of minority ethnic pupils. The study also found that promotion could mean that headteachers and deputy/assistant headteachers from minority ethnic groups are more likely to feel isolated than their white counterparts.

### *To what extent do teachers believe that age, ethnicity, disability and gender explain career differences?*

Certain groups of teachers believe that their personal characteristics have disadvantaged them. Older male and female teachers regard their age as a negative career influence. Females and minority ethnic teachers are more likely than white males to believe that their gender has negatively influenced their career. Minority ethnic males and females are more likely than their white counterparts to regard gender as an important factor in teachers' promotion prospects. Forty-three per cent (43%) of teachers surveyed believe that a disability would negatively influence a teacher's promotion prospects. Minority ethnic teachers are more likely to view disability as a disadvantage in career prospects. Older minority ethnic teachers are most likely to see ethnicity as a very important factor in promotion prospects, whereas younger white teachers are least likely to indicate this. Continuing inhibitors to career development opportunities seem to be a lack of attention to the needs of teachers with disabilities and from minority ethnic groups.

### *What career support would teachers like?*

Schools and LEAs arrange an impressive array of actions to attract and retain staff. Actions are directed at improving teachers' understanding of possible future roles as well as supporting improved performance in their current work. Teachers welcome these practices and also more extensive mentoring, shadowing and child observations. The schools which are most successful in attracting diverse teaching staff can be in disadvantaged or more privileged areas: the key factor appears to be school ethos. Many teachers would also like to see more flexible working practices that support diverse career patterns. There is considerable support for an independent careers advisory service that teachers can consult at different points in their careers.

### **Conclusions**

From the study we conclude that:

- It would be helpful for teachers to have career

structures that acknowledge different pressures and priorities at various stages in teachers' careers and enable all teachers to 'step in and step out' without penalty.

- Informants believe that having children often has a deleterious effect on women's careers. Recruitment and retention strategies would benefit from taking account of the diversity of family circumstances.
- Informants think that there are still stereotypes of good teachers being equated with male teachers.
- Those who perceive themselves as disadvantaged (minority ethnic respondents and informants with disabilities) want more equality of opportunity.
- Minority ethnic group informants emphasised that lack of finance and lack of time hamper access to CPD.
- Teachers with disabilities were more likely than other groups to think about leaving the profession. They said this was largely because of the stress incurred by coping with their disability while facing, what they perceive to be, a lack of awareness by their colleagues and insufficient adaptation of their teaching environment.
- Informants highlighted the problems associated with stress and excessive workload. 54% of survey respondents had contemplated leaving the profession in the previous year because of heavy workload (74%), too much paper work (68%), stress of teaching (66%), or long working hours (60%).
- Many informants were preoccupied with difficulties in their present situation rather than projecting forward and considering what would improve their future prospects. A reduction in their workload could allow them to think more about planning their future.
- Survey responses indicated that measures likely to keep a workforce in schools included more and better CPD for all staff, a reduction in workload and better pay (especially for younger teachers).
- Informants suggested that headteachers could support teachers in developing networks from the beginning of their careers, which may help teachers' later career development.
- The main finding is that a positive school ethos is crucial. We found that teachers appreciated working with enthusiastic, empathetic, colleagues and good supportive headteachers, who valued them as individuals.

## Implications

To ensure that age, ethnicity, disability and gender do not combine with the circumstances of an individual's training and school experience to the disadvantage of some groups, we suggest the following:

- Compliance with legislation by ensuring that all staff and governors are aware of legislative changes, particularly regarding equality of opportunities.
- Mainstreaming of equal opportunities by developing and implementing policies that are aware of age, disability, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, and recognise the benefits of diversity. This could be evaluated, for example, as part of school inspections by Ofsted.
- Emulating the existing examples of good practice, such as those identified by informants in this study.
- Effective monitoring of school development plans, equal opportunities policies and procedures, and evaluation of the implementation of equal opportunities legislation at school level through regular audit by LEAs.
- Attention to the practical conditions for improvement, including explicit criteria for recruitment and promotion; ensuring that promotion prospects are not damaged by having a 'flexible career'; opportunities for CPD for those not in full time permanent posts; encouraging under-represented groups to apply for promotion; and evidence-based practices that enable people with disabilities to contribute more to the profession.

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## Additional Information

*Copies of the full report (RR488) - priced £4.95 - are available by writing to DfES Publications, PO Box 5050, Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ.*

*Cheques should be made payable to "DfES Priced Publications".*

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*Further information about this research can be obtained from Gillian Redfearn, L6R, DfES, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3BT.*

*Email: [gillian.redfearn@dfes.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:gillian.redfearn@dfes.gsi.gov.uk)*

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