



TEACHER WELLBEING 2016

An emergent narrative to help support the needs of teachers in the 21st century (November 2016)

[Big Change](#) was created to think differently about the role that charity can play to catalyse positive change for young people in the UK. We identify and support early stage ideas that give young people the skills, opportunities and support they need, to thrive in life, not just exams. Since we launched in 2012, we have worked with a number of partners to help them develop and grow ideas that are preventative, systemic and have the potential to operate at large scale.

In the last two years, we have received a number of proposals that look to address the question of teacher wellbeing. At the time, we didn't feel that we understood the dynamics of teacher wellbeing well enough to commit meaningfully to it so this year we spent time meeting with a wide range of people and organisations to help us develop a clearer picture of what is happening. This document aims to put some of what we have heard on paper in a way that is shareable and puts some of the key themes and details up for debate.

We wrote this document with the support and guidance of [Ten Year's Time](#) to capture and summarise the salient parts of what we have heard and what we have learnt. It is not intended to be a statement of fact, nor is it final. As this process progresses, we expect the document to develop and change - we welcome comments and feedback on it and hope that it might also be helpful to other organisations interested in this space. We will be looking to soak up as much insight and advice as possible between now and Christmas 2016 before moving towards finding grant opportunities in Q1, 2017.

When we started this process, (in June 2016) we recognised that we had a lot to learn, that we would need to listen more than we spoke and that the solutions were unlikely to be obvious or easy. That hasn't changed but we are now at a stage where it makes sense to write up some of what we have heard so that we can begin to move forward with some ideas that have emerged.

Wellbeing

The word 'wellbeing' is understood differently depending on the context, in the case of wellbeing among teachers, our definition is best explained by the idea that teachers:

- Feel well equipped to help their students learn and develop
 - Are not inclined to leave the teaching profession due to the adverse effect it has on their broader life satisfaction
 - Feel content in their job and would recommend the profession to others.
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It would be easy to write up our findings and not say very much that is positive about teacher wellbeing in 2016. Some of the challenges facing teachers are as old as the profession itself, some are relatively new, some seem to affect all teachers at some point and some appear to more specific. One thing is very clear though, many teachers love what they do and enjoy the job as much as they would any other and while we have set out to discover what is not working well for teachers there is much that could also be celebrated. Here are some of the reasons why many teachers think it is the best job in the world:

- Never the same day twice
- Young people are great
- Working with colleagues that want the best for the people around them
- Constantly challenging
- Constantly learning

Some key assumptions and thoughts that are guiding this process

Schools with healthy and happy teachers is something worth aspiring to because:

- We think that will lead to healthier and happier students;
- We think that will lead to better academic results and attainment for students;
- It is an aspiration that stands alone in and of itself irrespective of those first two assumptions (ie. a school with happy teachers is better than a school with unhappy teachers achieving the same results)

What have we heard?

As well as writing up a narrative about what we have heard, we also thought it would be helpful to write up some statements of opinion that we think accurately reflect many of the voices we have heard in the last few months.

These bullet points are not designed to be statements of fact but are simply reflections of what we have heard, worthy of interrogation. They are not our conclusions but rather a starting point for a wider conversation about the points they raise.

System wide

- There has always been a general election every five years or so but in the last decade in particular, the frequency of changes in policy, curriculum and assessments has intensified (many of which we understand to be unnecessary or badly communicated)
 - That frequency has been made worse by short lead times and no planning time to implement changes
 - Many perceive OFSTED as a threat to good outcomes for students rather than something that enables them to do better and too often a head teacher's success depends on their ability to 'defend' their teachers from OFSTED
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- The majority of professional development is not fit for purpose and there is no structure to ensure teachers are constantly learning as their career develops
- Cuts in education and other local authority services have put more pressure on schools and their teachers
- There is a recruitment and retention "crisis" - there are not enough people joining the profession and too many are leaving it to meet the needs of schools at national level
- A 'football manager' syndrome now exists in schools and head teachers in particular are subject to short term targets that compromise a more sustainable long-term agenda
- Macro data is relatively easy to find but there is little in the way of micro data that sheds light on how wellbeing in particular varies across the country
- The status of teaching as a profession is low compared to other professions in the UK (eg. nursing) and to other countries (eg. Italy, Estonia, Finland). The rise in quick-access to frontline teaching programmes, such as Teach First, have broadened the number of people interested in the profession but at the same time challenged the idea of teaching as a life-long vocation
- Fragmentation is a challenge - there are thousands of schools in the UK and it is often hard to help them communicate with each other or share best practice across the sector

School level

- School structures are hierarchical by nature and often teachers feel that they are not listened to or understood either in their school or by the wider system (eg. Department of Education)
- There is little culture for innovation and improvement - teachers often feel that they are thought of as deliverers of a curriculum rather than agents of learning or of change for their students. At the same time, many schools and teachers feel pulled into too many state functions and want to be able to concentrate more on subject specialist teaching
- Heads are under a lot of pressure from all angles and often receive no additional training to cope with managing a school (the same is true of middle leaders and their respective responsibilities)
- Schools often do not have HR teams, resources, plans or capacity
- Heads and senior school management are often not trained in, or selected for, their staff management and development capabilities

Individual level

- Stressed teachers leads to stressed students
 - Teachers feel they have lost their purpose - they do not have the autonomy to teach as they wish due to school and system wide cultures
 - There is little time for a healthy life outside the school gates activities whether that be to eat well, do exercise or see friends
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- Teachers are not given enough time to plan and spend too much time marking - many cite workload as a key factor that affects their wellbeing
 - Isolated 'wellbeing interventions' such as free gym membership or mindfulness classes are widely not seen as the solution
 - Even when teachers are 'coping' well with their jobs, they have very little capacity for, or tolerance for, additional stresses outside the classroom or school (for example relationship break up, family death, sick dependents, recovering from trauma, etc.)
 - Teachers feeling agency and consistency in policy and leadership, we have been told, have a greater impact than workload on wellbeing
 - There are different challenges at different points in careers and those times of difficulty are often defined by periods of change:
 - Newly qualified teachers are the most vulnerable because they are the least experienced yet have the same expectations placed on them
 - Career teachers often feel overlooked for promotion against people coming into the profession for short periods, prepared to work unsustainable hours because they are only staying in the job for a few years
 - Middle leaders often receive very little adequate training to transition from teaching students to managing adults
 - Head teachers rarely receive the training or mentorship that is appropriate for managing the organisations that they do
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What we don't know

- Where the problem is more pronounced (and having data to support that). We have very little data to tell us whether teacher wellbeing correlates more strongly with school performance, geography, demography, stage in a teacher's development, school type, relationship with manager, longevity of school leadership, levels of support outside work, professional development or mentoring
- Based on the above, what affects wellbeing
- What ideas really could work and genuinely change the status quo on an issue so broad and deep
- What additions to a teacher's working life might make a difference - e.g. mentors, coaches, good management or indeed how best these additions should be structured and enacted
- What reductions to a teacher's working life might make a difference - eg. less marking
- Who is leaving the profession, what they are doing instead and on what terms they might be prepared to start teaching again
- How those who have left the profession might support it after they have left
- How to support and improve leadership in schools
- How to accurately measure wellbeing in a way that is scalable (over time and geography), widely recognised and helps us to understand what we could do about it

Some initial ideas we think are worth exploring further

- Mining and collating existing data and/or conducting new research to understand in more detail about where and how teacher wellbeing is different for teachers in the UK (ie. is it different in primary vs secondary, urban vs rural,
 - Rather than introducing new initiatives, run an (at least) year long trial with several different, but comparable schools, to take away some of the practices that are currently being imposed on teachers (eg. marking targets) or make some simple additions (eg. adhering to CPD guidelines)
 - Develop a mentoring programme for teachers at specific points in their career when we think they are most vulnerable (eg. newly qualified, middle leadership, headship)
 - Explore what it would take to bring excellence in HR to schools and Multi-Academy Trusts
 - Work with existing CPD providers to improve the quality of support and ensure that more teachers have access to it (borrowing from examples of best practice in the private and public sectors)
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What We've Heard

Policy changes

We know that there are frequent changes to the policy surrounding education as well as individual curriculums and assessments. These often do not come with enough time for teachers and schools to prepare and there is no additional time available to redevelop the syllabus, placing additional workloads on teachers. A lot of people in the sector do not see the need for these changes and view them as "change for changes sake".

Although there is a timeline in place for announcements about these changes, the actual delivery of information on what these changes may entail, including what the new curriculum might look like, is often not released far enough in advance. Teachers are being given a new curriculum half way through the previous year, with no additional time to prepare and therefore are delivering curriculums they do not feel prepared and confident on to their students.

Training and CPD

We have heard that ITT does not focus enough on practice, and instead places an emphasis on theory. This means that teachers are not given the chance to develop good practice and strong habits in a way that means they can put them into practice once they are in a higher stress, higher stakes live environment.

The training and support environment beyond ITT is also an area we have heard that the current offering is varied in quality. This is compounded by the fact that it is up to individuals and schools to find time and budget to allow teachers to further themselves, meaning that schools with more pressure on them may not be willing to allow their teachers out of the classroom for CPD.

OFSTED

We have heard that there are mixed messages about what Ofsted want to see. Some see it as a standards regulator, with little interest in the practice used to meet high standards. Others say they want to see evidence of "best practice" including triple marking etc. It definitely seems like Ofsted or perceptions of Ofsted is responsible for setting much of the tone and the culture of the wider education system.

Systemic issues

The education system due to its structure, size and variety is very fragmented and often disconnected and so communicating directly with teachers is often quite hard. Thought leaders are not widely recognised throughout and teaching is only linked through the unions, further heightening their importance in the sector.

We have heard that much of the problem is down to cultures within schools, with strict hierarchies and management and leadership who have often not received any formal management training and manage using the skills they developed in the classroom. We have heard that many teachers feel infantilised by this culture, their loss of purpose as educators resulting in a loss of motivation and subsequent drop in their feelings of wellbeing.

There are a number of schools across that UK and many act independently of each other. That makes it difficult to create change across the system, so any advances would need to be done through existing networks of schools including MATs, LAs, teaching schools etc.

The challenge of leadership

We heard the phrase “football manager syndrome” a couple of times through this research wherein heads are given an academic year to turn around a school and if they do not succeed they are removed. This concept of being afraid of failure is also prevalent in the classroom, resulting in teachers nervous to try new ideas and deviate from the norm. Performance based pay has also contributed in this sense, as teachers are now assessed on a very slim view of success and are rewarded or penalised accordingly.

We have heard that many middle leaders and deputy heads are reluctant to take on a leadership role because of the high stress and pressure they expect to be subjected to. As a result, there are fewer exceptional heads spread across numerous schools, stretching them even thinner.

Motivation and self worth

Motivation is an area that came up multiple times, with the theory behind declining teaching wellbeing summarised under Daniel Pink’s concepts of autonomy, mastery and purpose. This idea that humans need these three things to motivate themselves in their work and it is not a case of carrot and stick being enough to incentivise employees. Taking this into the teaching world we can see that the first has been removed, the second is in decline and the third finds itself threatened by the rest of the environment.

Workload

We have heard that the workload teachers are under has not changed much in the last three decades; teaching has always been a long hours and stressful profession. What has changed is the balance of the work with more of a focus now on marking and data inputting as opposed to time spent planning and teaching. While many feel that an increase in accountability is a good thing, there appears to be a common view that this has gone too far and much of the unnecessary side of this can be stripped away or delegated to others.

Role of government

The wider public sector cuts have affected the role of a school and a teacher dramatically, particularly in highly deprived areas where typically students would have more involvement with other agencies including social services and CAMHS. Schools are now finding themselves responsible for students who need additional professional help and support but are unable to access it due to change in referral thresholds as a result of cuts in budgets and reduction in staff.

This has been compounded by cuts in schools budgets that means the removal of support staff that are able to take some of the burden off teachers, including school counsellors and TAs who work specifically with children who may be struggling in the mainstream classroom.

This challenge of maintaining wellbeing in schools in more deprived areas is compounded by additional behavioural problems that result in more stressed teachers. With students who come from less supportive and engaged environments it is important that teachers they are working with are setting the standard of what good wellbeing looks like.

Healthy choices

We have heard of the links between teachers physical and mental health; due to the long hours and stress of the job teachers find it difficult to find time to exercise, see friends and family and relax. We heard a number of times about this feeling of guilt if a teacher finds themselves not working.

Life cycle of a teacher

We have heard that there are different challenges for different stages in a teacher's work life and therefore different solutions need to be looked at:

1. NQTs - new to profession, yet to develop understanding and resources
 2. 7year+ qualified but not yet in management - these teachers feel their professional development has been overlooked and there is not a clear path for them
 3. Heads - promoted from the teaching staff to run the school but without additional training or support to develop and run an effective and good school, often given very short timetables to turnaround schools in a very high pressure environment.
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Further reading

Useful summary (Economist)

- <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21700385-great-teaching-has-long-been-seen-innate-skill-reformers-are-showing-best>

Workload (DofE)

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workload-challenge-analysis-of-teacher-responses>
- https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/511258/Eliminating-unnecessary-workload-associated-with-data-management.pdf

Mental health challenges (TES)

- <https://www.tes.com/news/school-news/breaking-news/stress-driving-quarter-teachers-take-medication>

Correlation between teacher wellbeing and pupil wellbeing (Education Support Partnership)

- https://www.educationsupportpartnership.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/healthy_teachers_higher_marks_report_0.pdf

Teacher perspectives (Guardian)

- <https://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/series/the-secret-teacher>

Teacher hiring and retention (NFER)

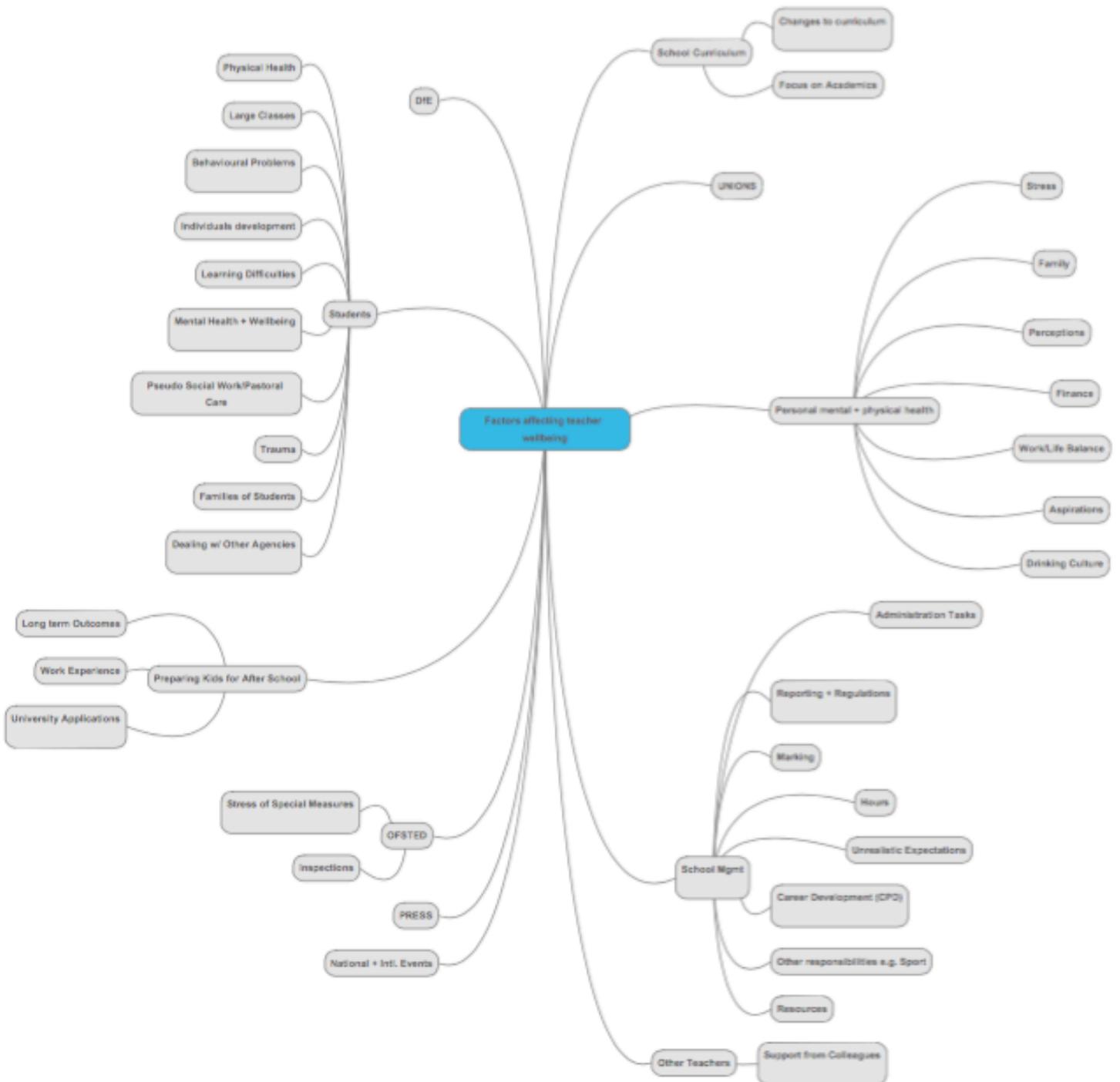
- <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSA01>
- <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LFSB01/>

Motivations for joining, staying or leaving teaching (Durham University)

- <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/1857/1/1857.pdf>
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Appendix I - wellbeing factors mind map

We developed the mind maps in Appendix I & II at the beginning of our research to try and understand at a headline level some of the factors that play a role in the wellbeing of teachers. It is not comprehensive, nor has it been validated by any third party but we hope it can be a useful perspective for other organisations interested in this space.



Appendix II - influences mind map

