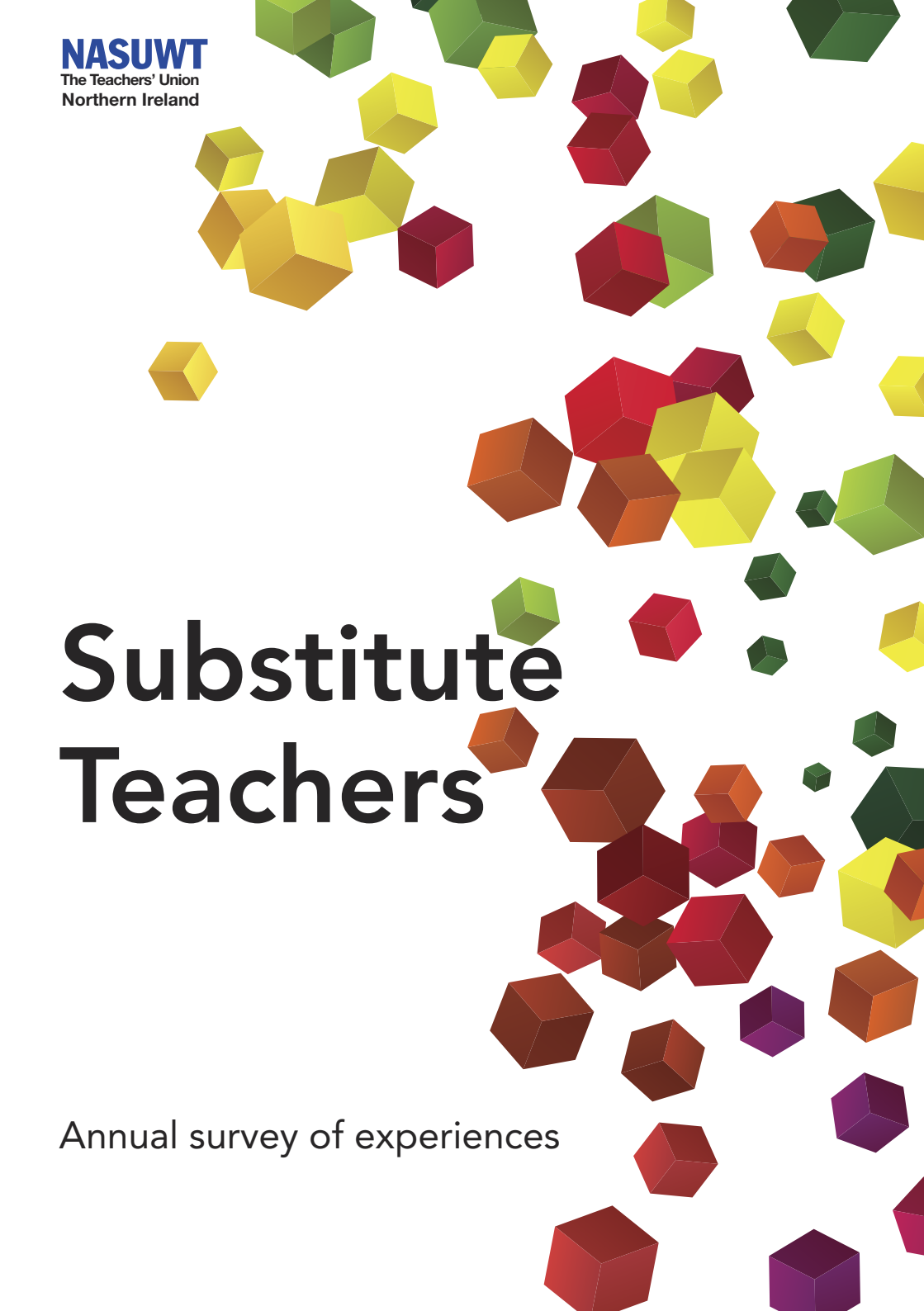


Substitute Teachers

Annual survey of experiences



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INTRODUCTION

Substitute teachers are integral to the education system, a fact that has been brought into sharp focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without substitute teachers, many pupils would be denied the opportunity to be taught by qualified and dedicated teachers who ensure that schools can continue to provide the education to which children and young people are entitled. Substitute teachers make a vital contribution to securing high educational standards for all children and young people.

The NASUWT's annual survey of substitute teachers in Northern Ireland aims to examine the changing experiences of substitute teachers, including issues and trends.

The 2020 survey was undertaken between September and October.

A total of 189 substitute teachers responded to the survey.

This Report provides the main findings from the 2020 survey of substitute teachers and highlights the experiences of substitute teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the wider opening of schools from the autumn term 2020.

THE SURVEY

Nature of work

Substitute teachers were asked about their ability to secure work teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown. Half of respondents (50%) reported that they were unable to secure work teaching during the pandemic.

Access to work

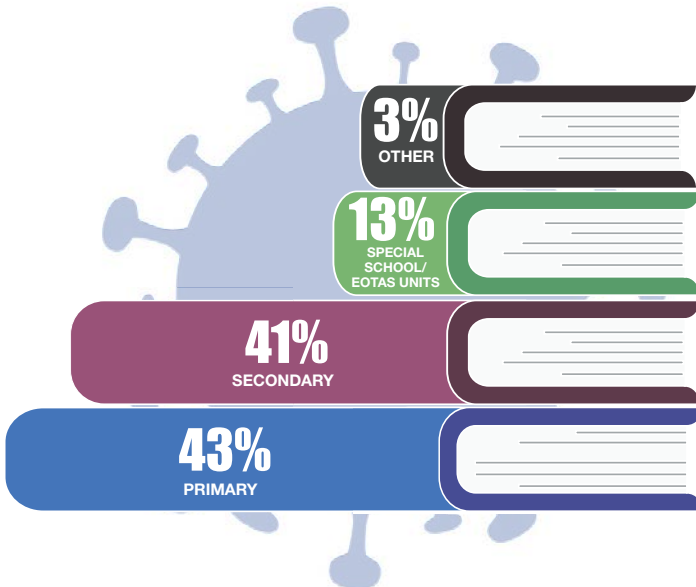
Just under three fifths of substitute teachers (59%) reported that they were working for one school during the COVID-19 pandemic, and just over one in 20 substitute teachers (6%) reported that they were working for two schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“*Already employed by a school prior to lockdown and they kept me on for online learning.*”

Availability of work

Substitute teachers were asked where they were able to obtain work during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

Just over two fifths of substitute teachers (43%) who responded to the survey stated that their substitute work took place in primary schools, 41% stated that their work was in secondary schools, and 13% reported that their work took place in a special school/Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) unit.



Working for a school during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown

Substitute teachers were asked about their experiences working for a school during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

Of those substitute teachers working on long-term assignments, just over three quarters (76%) reported that the school continued to pay them for the period for which they were engaged, whereas just under a quarter of substitute teachers (24%) reported that the school continued to pay them for the period for which they were engaged.

Twenty-four per cent of substitute teachers on long-term assignments were not paid by the school for the period for which they were engaged.

As a result of the loss of work associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, almost three fifths of substitute teachers (58%) applied for the COVID Hardship Fund. Of those substitute teachers who applied, 91% reported that they were successful in their application and received an 80% payment.

It is extremely stressful not knowing from month to month if we will have enough work to pay the bills.

Financial situation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown

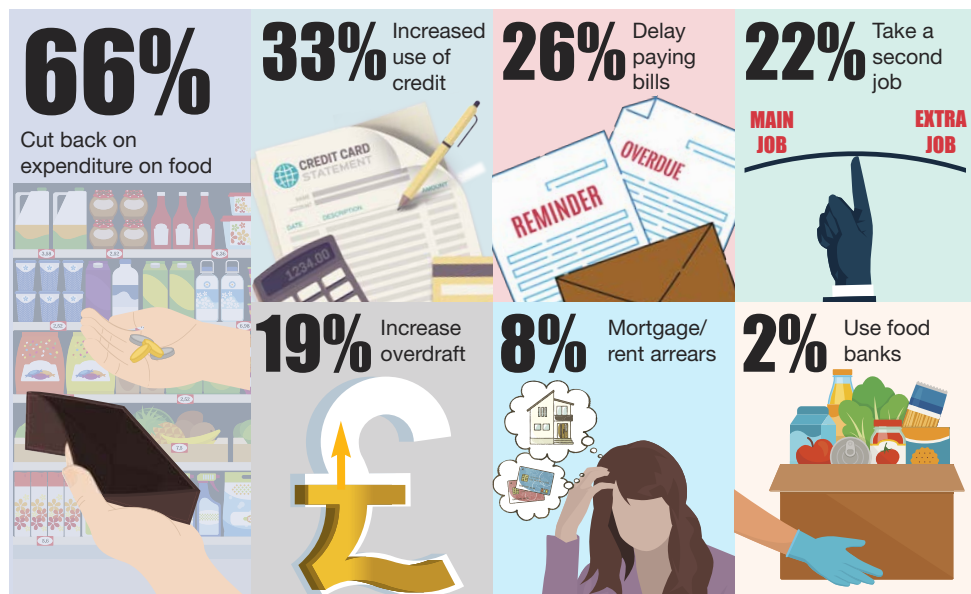
Substitute teachers were asked about their financial situation during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown.

Just under a third of substitute teachers (31%) reported that they had sourced work elsewhere other than teaching since the COVID-19 pandemic. Of those, 93% stated that the work sourced elsewhere other than teaching failed to provide the same level of financial income that they would have obtained had they been able to obtain work teaching.

Almost a quarter of substitute teachers (24%) reported having to claim some form of state benefit since the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Universal Credit), and

just over three fifths of respondents (61%) stated that they had experienced financial hardship since the pandemic began.

Financial situation since the COVID-19 pandemic



I had to remove my child from crèche as I could not afford to continue to pay the monthly bill, resulting in losing my childcare place for September.

Stress and anxiety, worrying day and night that if this continues, I may have to leave teaching.

Securing work from September 2020

Just over a third of substitute teachers (34%) reported that they had not been offered work or were unable to secure any work with the full opening of schools from September 2020.

This is the first time in seven years that I have not secured a post in September.

For those substitute teachers who reported that they were offered or were able to secure work with the full opening of schools from September 2020, over a third of respondents (34%) reported that this was ad hoc/daily work, one in ten (10%) said that this was weekly assignments, and 13% stated that this was monthly assignments. One in ten substitute teachers (10%) reported that this was termly assignments, and just under two fifths (39%) stated that they were offered or able to secure work in excess of a termly assignment.

Well over a quarter of those substitute teachers (28%) who were able to secure work reported that they had not been provided with information regarding the school's risk assessment, as well as other appropriate information (e.g. behaviour management policy).

Over three fifths of substitute teachers (63%) stated that the opportunities to undertake substitute work will decrease from September 2020. Just under a fifth of substitute teachers (19%) stated that the opportunities to undertake substitute work will increase, and 18% of respondents stated that the opportunities will stay the same.

Just under two thirds of substitute teachers (64%) think that the need to maintain the integrity of 'bubbles' in schools will have a detrimental impact on their ability to secure work from September 2020. However, 15% of substitute teachers think that the need to maintain the integrity of 'bubbles' in schools will not have a detrimental impact on their ability to secure work from September 2020, and just over a fifth of substitute teachers (21%) reported that they were not sure about the impact on their ability to secure work from September 2020.



Schools are very reluctant to bring anyone new into bubbles.

Just under half of substitute teachers (48%) stated that the advice from the Department of Education (DE) on the utilisation of substitute teachers from September will have a detrimental impact or no impact at all on the ability to secure work from September 2020.

Over a fifth of substitute teachers (22%) stated that the DE's Engage Programme would have a negative impact or no impact at all on their ability to secure work from October 2020. Only 2% of substitute teachers stated that it would have a positive impact on their ability to secure work from October 2020.

Rates of pay for substitute teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic

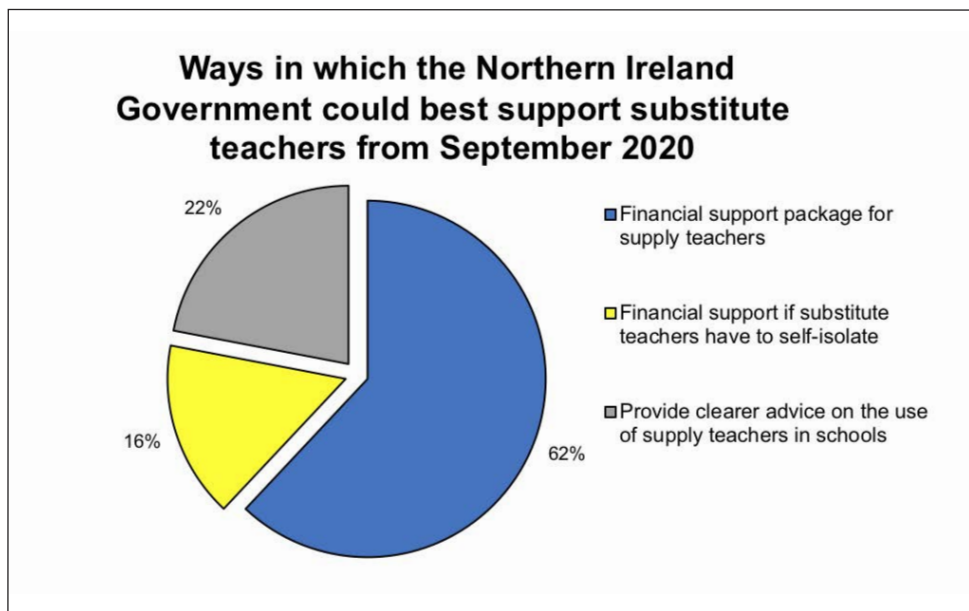
In respect of rates of pay, substitute teachers were asked if they had been paid at the correct point on the teachers' pay scale for the work they had undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ninety-five per cent reported that they had been paid on the correct point on the teachers' pay scale, but one in 20 substitute teachers (5%) stated that this was not the case.

Four fifths of substitute teachers (80%) reported that the daily rate of remuneration offered during the COVID-19 pandemic was in line with their level of experience and expertise.

Health and safety issues for substitute teachers from September 2020

Over two fifths of substitute teachers (43%) stated that they were concerned about their health and safety when all schools opened from September 2020, and 30% stated that they were concerned that they might be penalised for disclosing personal information about their health and safety when seeking to undertake assignments from September 2020.

Over a third of substitute teachers (35%) at greater vulnerability to COVID-19 reported that they were not confident that their employer would complete an individual risk assessment with them before undertaking an assignment.



CONCLUSION

Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of substitute teachers and the crucial role they have played, the 2020 substitute teacher survey reveals that the experiences of substitute teachers have been mixed.

The lack of financial support available to a number of substitute teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a situation where a number of substitute teachers have been forced to secure work outside of teaching, often at rates of pay that are not commensurate with the level of income derived from teaching.

This has exposed the disparity between the pay of substitute teachers and others, as well as placing substitute teachers in a precarious financial situation where they have had to make tough decisions about their expenditure, or rely on the increased use of credit or the generosity of family and friends to make ends meet. Some substitute teachers have been forced to claim Universal Credit and there are those who have had to rely on food banks.

In addition, there are concerns that these disparities in treatment are impacting disproportionately on women, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups and disabled teachers, who are more likely to be employed as substitute teachers.

Furthermore, the opening of schools from September 2020 has not alleviated the stress and anxiety some substitute teachers have about the lack of work available, particularly given the detrimental impact that advice and guidance from the Northern Ireland Government has had on the use of substitute teachers from the autumn term.

Even when work is available, substitute teachers have significant concerns over their health and safety, as agencies and the schools are not providing the key information on risk assessments to enable substitute teachers to feel confident when undertaking an assignment.

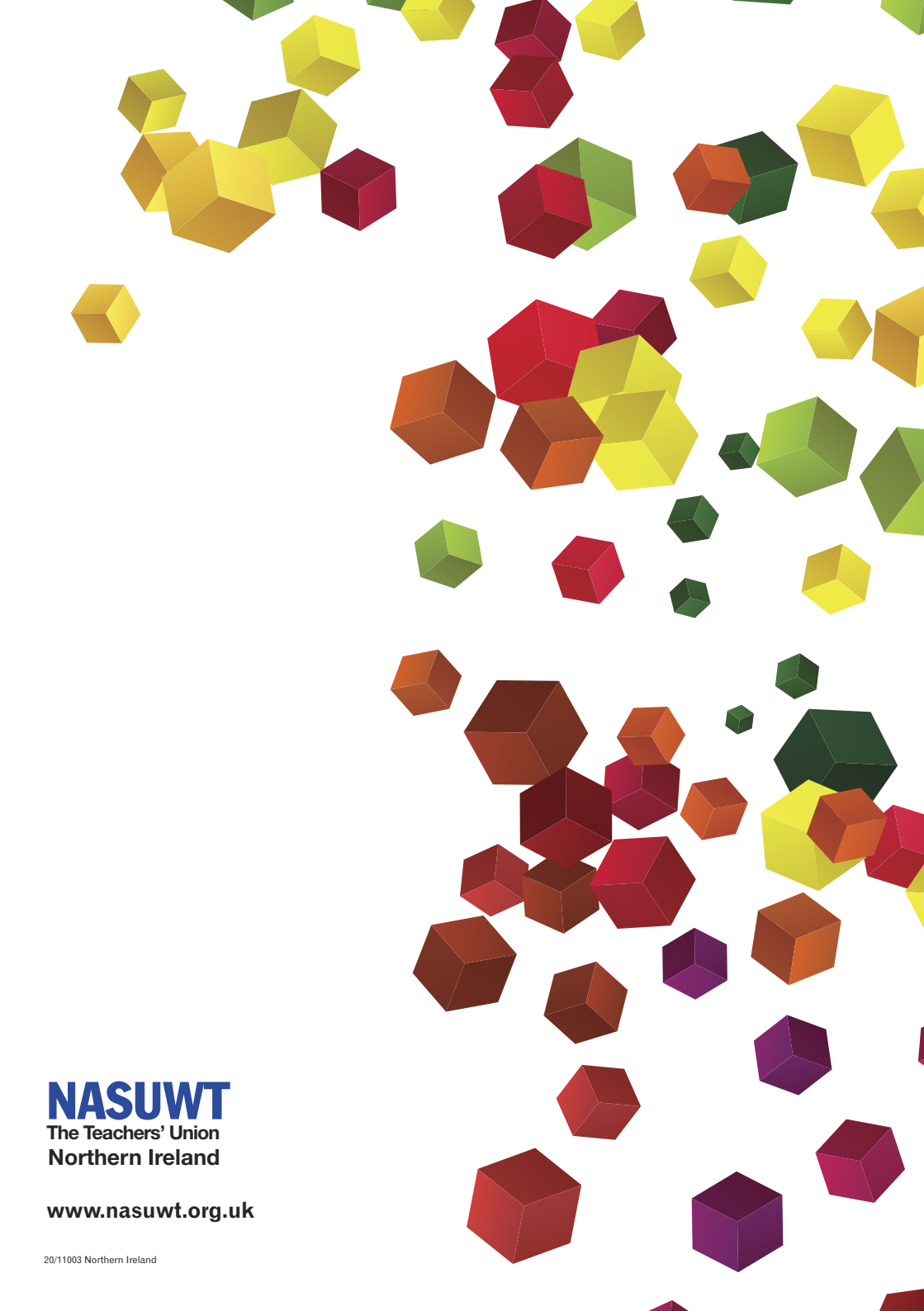
In this context, the results from the 2020 survey indicate that there is a need to ensure that hard-working and dedicated substitute teachers, who make an important and significant contribution to the public education system, are afforded some level of financial support going forwards.



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