

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 as schools have continued to deal with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic during 2021/22. 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 2022 survey was undertaken between July and August.

A total of 75 substitute teachers responded to the survey.

This Report provides the findings from the 2022 survey of substitute teachers and highlights the experiences of substitute teachers during the academic year 2021/22.

THE SURVEY

Nature of work

Substitute teachers were asked about their ability to secure work teaching during the academic year 2021/22. Over three quarters (77%) reported that they had no problems securing work, where just under a quarter (23%) reported that they had problems securing work. Of those who had problems securing work, 1% stated that they could not secure any substitute work.

I was able to get work for every day I was available to work on.

I received very few calls from NISTR, even though I had marked myself as available.

Above-average staff absences, often COVID related, meant I was offered more work than I could actually take on.

Access to work

During the academic year 2021/22, well over two fifths of substitute teachers (43%) reported that they were working for one school, 14% reported that they were working for two schools, 12% reported that they were working for three schools, just 1% reported that they were working for four schools, and 12% reported that they were working for five schools. Just under one fifth of substitute teachers (18%) reported that they were working for more than five schools.

When asked if this was more or less than the number of schools they had worked for during the previous year, just over two fifths of substitute teachers (42%) stated that it was more, 17% stated that it was less, and 41% stated that it had stayed the same. Just over two fifths of those who responded (41%) said that this was a direct result of the way in which they were treated by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just under a quarter of substitute teachers (24%) reported that they had to travel further than in previous years in order to secure work.

Wasn't needed the previous year due to COVID, so half the previous year was spent in a different occupation altogether.

There was a lot more demand for teachers.

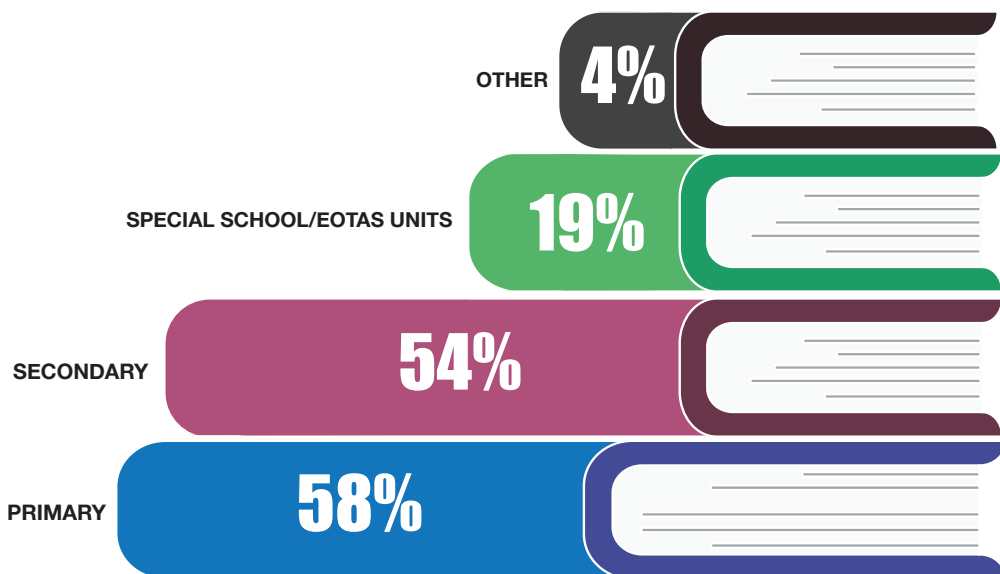
The Engage Programme granted more work.

Availability of work

Substitute teachers were asked where they were able to obtain work during the academic year 2021/22.

Just under three fifths of substitute teachers (58%) who responded to the survey stated that they were able to secure work in primary schools, 54% stated that they were able to secure work in secondary schools, and 19% reported that they were able to secure work in special schools/Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) units.

Where substitute teachers secured work during the academic year 2021/22



For those substitute teachers who reported that they were able to secure work during the academic year 2021/22, just under a quarter (25%) reported that the majority of their substitute teaching was ad hoc/daily work, just over one in ten (12%) said that this was weekly assignments, and just under one in 20 (4%) stated that this was monthly assignments. Just over one in ten substitute teachers (11%) reported that the majority of their work was termly assignments, and just under half (49%) stated that the majority of their teaching was on longer term assignments in excess of a term.

When substitute teachers were asked how many days on average they were able to obtain work during the academic year 2021/22, 1% said they secured work one day a week, just over one in 20 (6%) two days a week, and well over two fifths (23%) three days a week. Just over one in ten (11%) of substitute teachers in the survey said they were able to secure work for four days a week, and just under three fifths (59%) stated that they were able to secure work five days a week.

One in ten substitute teachers (10%) stated that the amount of substitute work had decreased during 2021/22, compared to the previous academic year, whereas just over half of substitute teachers (51%) stated that the amount of substitute work had increased. Thirty-nine per cent of respondents stated that the amount of substitute teaching work they were able to secure had stayed the same.

Just under a third of substitute teachers (31%) stated that the Department of Education's (DE's) Engage Programme had a positive impact on their ability to secure work during the academic year 2021/22.

Working for a school during the academic year 2021/22

Substitute teachers were asked about their experiences working for a school or schools during the academic year 2021/22.

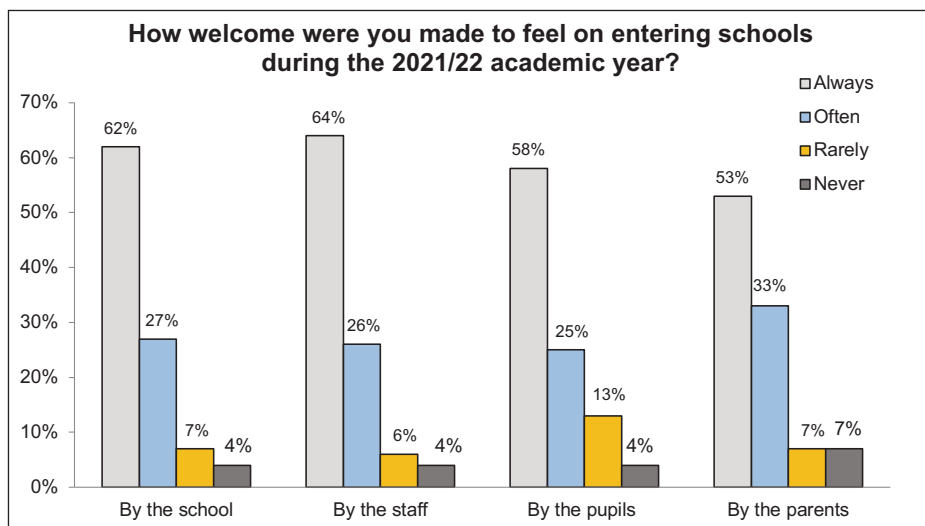
Just over three fifths of substitute teachers (62%) reported that they are always made to feel welcome *by the school*, and 27% stated that they are often made to feel welcome *by the school*. However, 7% said that they are rarely made to feel welcome by the school, and 4% stated that they are never made to feel welcome by the school.

When asked how welcome they are *made to feel by the staff in schools*, just under two thirds of substitute teachers (64%) reported that they are always made to feel welcome, and just over a quarter (26%) reported that they are often made to feel welcome by the staff in schools. However, just over one in 20 (6%) reported that they are rarely made to feel welcome by the staff in schools, and 4% reported that they are never made to feel welcome by the staff in schools.

When asked how welcome they are made to feel *by the pupils in schools*, just under three fifths of substitute teachers (58%) reported that they are always made to feel welcome, and a quarter (25%) reported that they are often made to feel welcome by the pupils in schools. Thirteen per cent reported that they are rarely made to feel welcome by the pupils, and 4% stated that they are never made to feel welcome by the pupils.

The attitude from staff and pupils towards subs is overall rude and discouraging because they aren't seen as 'proper' teachers.

In respect of being *made to feel welcome by the parents*, well over half of substitute teachers (53%) stated that they are always made to feel welcome, and a third (33%) stated that they are made to feel welcome by the parents. Just over one in 20 (7%) stated that they are rarely made to feel welcome by the parents, and just over one in 20 (7%) stated that they are never made to feel welcome by the parents.



Of those substitute teachers able to secure work during the 2021/22 academic year, two fifths (40%) stated that they were not given the school's overall risk assessment and just under a quarter (24%) stated that they were not given the procedures and protective measures for staff to follow to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19.

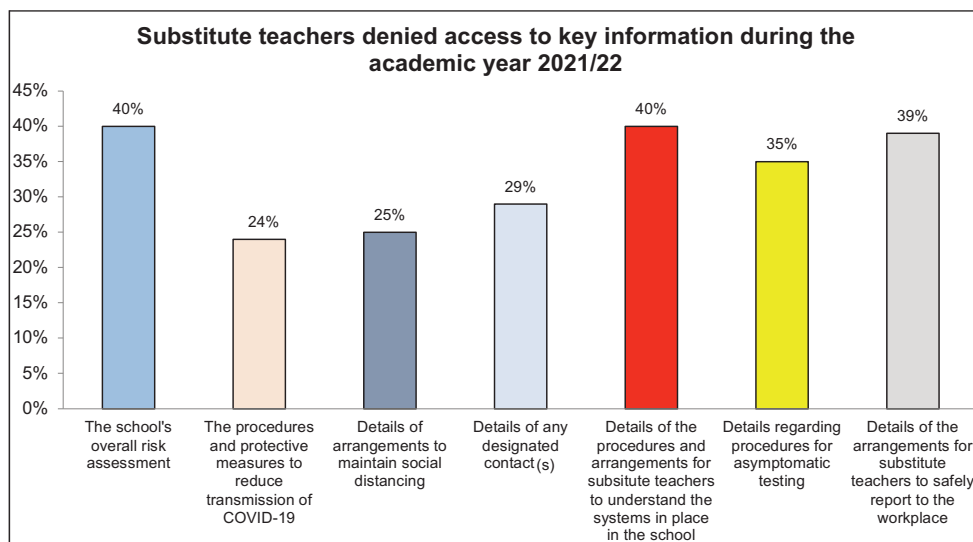
Just under two fifths of substitute teachers (39%) stated that they were not given the arrangements in place for substitute teachers to report safely to the workplace,

and two fifths (40%) stated that they were not given the details of the arrangements to ensure there was adequate time to be made aware of, and understand, the systems in place in the school, including in respect of COVID-19. Twenty-nine per cent stated that they were not provided with the details of any designated contact(s) for any questions, problems or emergencies (COVID-specific or otherwise).

A quarter of substitute teachers (25%) stated that they were not provided with the details of the arrangements to maintain social distancing and minimise contact, as well as how pupils are expected to be managed to ensure social distancing, and 35% stated that they were unaware of the details of the steps and procedures in place for twice-weekly asymptomatic testing, including for substitute teachers.

Well over two fifths of substitute teachers (46%) stated that they were not provided with the details of the contact person for obtaining the relevant NHS Test and Trace notification from the school, should they have needed to apply for any financial support.

The Head of Department was helpful if I asked questions, but no real instructions or safeguarding was addressed by the school.



When asked about their most recent assignment, 16% of substitute teachers reported that they did not have access to a designated person or contact, and just under a quarter (24%) reported that they did not know.

Health and safety issues for substitute teachers during the academic year 2021/22

Just under half of substitute teachers (48%) who secured work during the academic year 2021/22 stated that they were concerned about their health and safety when in schools, and just under one in ten (8%) stated that they may have been penalised or had work cancelled for disclosing personal information about their health and safety.

Sent into classes where there were high numbers of COVID amongst children and staff. No regard given to the possibility of me catching COVID.

Just under three fifths of substitute teachers (58%) at greater vulnerability to COVID-19 reported that their employer did not complete an individual risk assessment with them before undertaking an assignment.

Rates of pay for substitute teachers during the academic year 2021/22

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 academic year 2021/22. Nine out of ten (90%) reported that they had been paid on the correct point on the teachers' pay scale, but one in ten of substitute teachers (10%) stated that this was not the case.

Well over four fifths of substitute teachers (86%) reported that the daily rate of remuneration offered during the academic year 2021/22 was in line with their level of experience and expertise.

Financial situation during the academic year 2021/22

Substitute teachers were asked about their financial situation during the academic year 2021/22.

Almost a third of substitute teachers (32%) reported that they had sourced work elsewhere other than teaching during the academic year 2021/22. Of those, 68% 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.

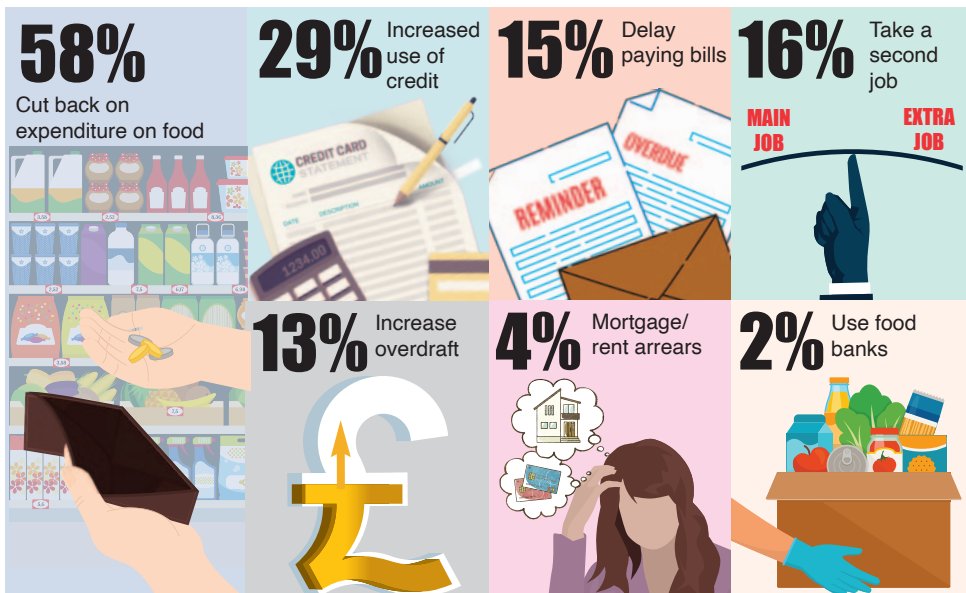
Over one in ten of substitute teachers (12%) reported having to claim some form of state benefit during the academic year 2021/22 (e.g. Universal Credit), and just under two fifths of respondents (39%) stated that they had experienced financial hardship as a substitute teacher over the same period. Of those, a third reported that this was a result of the situation in regards to COVID-19.

Not being paid over the summer caused financial hardship as I had no income for two months.

I had to use overdraft and take out credit card. I was supposed to mark for CCEA but exams did not happen and I was not given compensation.

I have a part-time job in a supermarket that I do alongside my job as a substitute teacher, as during the months that schools are closed for half-term holidays and school holidays, I struggle financially.

Just under two fifths of respondents (39%) stated that they had experienced financial hardship as a substitute teacher.



Well over half of substitute teachers (55%) reported that they were required to self-isolate during the academic year 2021/22. Of those, well over two fifths (45%) reported that their employer did not make them aware of whether they were eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), and 29% of substitute teachers reported that they did not know.

Just under a quarter of substitute teachers (24%) who were required to self-isolate reported that they were not eligible for any financial support, and over half (52%) reported that they did not know.

Just cut spending, had to use charity shops.

I have had to cut back on expenditure, visiting family/friends, which has had a negative impact on my mental wellbeing.

Concerns substitute teachers have over national insurance increase

Less money in my wages each month means I have been able to save less and not keep as much by for the summer holidays.

Even more financial hardship as a single parent.

Definitely noticed a reduction in take-home pay and impact felt more with rising living costs.

Less income to help with the increase in the cost of living.



Training and behaviour management support

Just over half (51%) of substitute teachers stated that they had not been given access to continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in the last 12 months.

For those substitute teachers who had access to CPD, the primary sources of training were obtained via the schools where they worked (62%), the Education Authority (55%) or from their trade union (14%).

Just under a third of substitute teachers (32%) reported that they do not feel they are treated with respect and dignity.

You're just viewed as another body in the school.

Ways in which the Northern Ireland Government could best support substitute teachers moving forwards



33% Financial support when not able to work/work is cancelled.



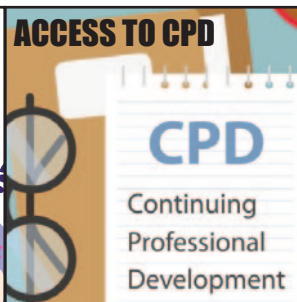
13% Develop NISTR.



33% Create more permanent contracts.



3% Provide clearer advice and procedures on the use of substitute teachers in schools.



7% Access to CPD.



11% Spread payments for assignments.

I am looking for alternative employment, unless something radically changes in the working conditions of substitute teachers.

Based on their experiences as a substitute teacher during the academic year 2021/22, over half of substitute teachers (52%) reported that they were looking for work outside of teaching.

CONCLUSION

The 2021/22 survey of substitute teachers further reinforces the key role that substitute teachers have played as schools and colleges have continued to emerge from the worst excesses of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the survey still demonstrates that the experiences of substitute teachers throughout the pandemic and academic year 2021/22 have been varied. For some substitute teachers, the opportunities for work have increased, including longer work in excess of a term, whereas others have seen their opportunities for work decrease, some to the extent that they have had to find work elsewhere.

The situation for substitute teachers has been compounded by the cost-of-living crisis and levels of inflation the likes of which have not been seen for decades. For substitute teachers who are subject to the vagaries of intermittent and insecure employment, the cost-of-living crisis is ever more prescient.

The lack of financial support, including for periods of COVID-related self-isolation, coupled with the rise in National Insurance from April 2022, has placed more substitute teachers in a precarious financial situation where they have had to make tough decisions about their expenditure, such as cutting back on their expenditure on food and making use of food banks. Some substitute teachers have been forced to claim Universal Credit and there are those who have had to rely on the generosity of family and friends to make ends meet.

Given that the overwhelming majority of substitute teachers are female, there are concerns that these disparities in treatment are impacting disproportionately on women, as well as Black and disabled teachers, who are more likely to be employed as substitute teachers.

Furthermore, the continued failure of many schools to address and provide the most basic health and safety information is having a detrimental impact on hard-working and dedicated substitute teachers when undertaking an assignment.

In this context, the results from the 2022 survey substantiate the pressing need for a better deal for teachers which seeks to address the concerns of hard-working and dedicated substitute teachers.



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