EIS Member Survey 2021:
Health and Wellbeing findings

Member Survey Results

December 2021

The Educational Institute of Scotland

Background

The EIS is the largest teacher trade union in Scotland, representing over 80% of all teachers across nursery, primary and secondary education. With such a broad and expansive membership, the EIS is committed to seeking and representing the views of its members through direct engagements as well as through the use of member surveys.

For just short of 2 years, teachers in Scotland have been battling COVID-19 infections within schools, continually adjusting policies and practices to implement safety mitigations, as well as continuing to provide blended learning to support the large number of pupils who have been absent due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our members within the secondary school sector have also performed herculean efforts to prepare students for national qualifications with ever-changing requirements.

The past 21 months have undoubtedly put a strain on our teachers and our education system as a whole. However, even before March 2020 teachers in Scotland had raised the alarm on high levels of stress, unsustainable levels of workload and poor wellbeing within the profession.[1]

This survey looks at the key issues facing teachers in Scotland today: workload, COVID-19 and their health and wellbeing at work.

Methodology

The EIS school sector survey was opened on Thursday 11th November and closed on the morning of 29th November. The survey has a total of 32 questions, but owing to survey design, most members were not required to answer all questions.

In total 16,056 responses were gathered, with a return rate of 32%. This turnout shows just under a third of all members eligible have completed the survey. The average response time to complete the survey was 8 minutes; however some members noted that it took them longer than this due to the extended answers that they gave.

Eligible members were emailed a link to the survey, which was also promoted on the EIS website and the EIS social media pages. Prior to the survey going live to members, it was issued to a small test sample of members for peer review.

The survey was broken down into 4 sections: About You, COVID-19, Workload, and Health and Wellbeing. There was also an opportunity at the end for members to note any further comments.

None of the questions were mandatory. This allowed respondents to skip questions as they progressed throughout the survey. This was done to ensure that there was no false recording within the survey, to improve confidence in the results. Some questions also had 'logic' applied, meaning that respondents would be redirected to different follow-on questions depending on the answers they gave. Details of how many respondents answered each question are included throughout this report.

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[1] EIS, Value Education, Value Teachers Survey Results (2019) https://www.eis.org.uk/Time-To-Tackle-Workload/SurveyResults

All figures within this report have been rounded to the nearest one decimal place, meaning that some questions may not have a total exacting 100%, with other questions within the survey allowing for multiple responses.

There was considerable opportunity for members to record more detailed answers to the questions posed, either by using comment boxes, or by ticking an "other" option where appropriate. Throughout this report member comments have been included under the corresponding questions. As some questions within the survey elicited thousands of additional comments or responses, the quotes selected are only a snapshot of this wider data but have been chosen to reflect the majority of views captured.

Margin of Error

This survey was conducted on the Survey Monkey platform. Survey Monkey describes the margin of error as:

"Margin of error (also called confidence interval) indicates the level of certainty with which you can expect your survey results to reflect the views from the overall population. Surveying is always a balancing act where you use a smaller group (your survey respondents) to represent a much larger one (the target market or total population).

"Margin of error is often used as a way of measuring how effective a survey is. The smaller the margin of error, the more confidence you may have in your results. The bigger the margin of error, the farther they can stray from the views of the total population. One way in which to reduce the margin of error is to increase the sample size."[2]

Using the full eligible membership as our baseline figure, the margin of error with our sample of 16,056 is less than one percent[3].

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[2] Survey Monkey, Margin of Error Calculator https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/margin-of-error-calculator/?ut_source=mp&ut_source2=sample-size-calculator&ut_source3=inline&ut_ctatext=margin%2520of%2520error%2520calculator
[3] Ibid.

About You Findings

About You

The first section of the survey asked respondents to fill in key details about themselves. The answers given in these opening sections give an indication of who our members are and what they teach. Whilst these answers provide insight into EIS teacher members when looked at on their own, they can also be analysed alongside other questions within this survey to provide information on how different sections of EIS membership responded to certain issues.

Within the survey, members were asked whether they taught in primary, secondary, nursery, or special schools (with the ability to select more than one option as appropriate), with secondary school teachers then also being asked what subject(s) they taught. Members were asked, also, to state what their substantive post is from a range of options, and which local authority they worked in.

The questions on member characteristics were compulsory, to ensure that only eligible members filled in the survey, as well as ensuring that there was a large sample to allow for disaggregation. Where the sample size was lower than 1,000 these have not been disaggregated to ensure confidence in the results.

Where useful, results have been refined to illustrate nuances in response based on indicators such as sector worked in, post held or any other relevant characteristic.

Health and Wellbeing

This section of the 2021 EIS member survey looked at teacher health and wellbeing. The expectations and demands placed on teachers are great, and have become greater still during the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as providing learning support, teachers are often expected to support their pupils with a range of social, emotional and behavioural needs which can be a physically and emotionally demanding aspect of the job.

These questions seek to understand the level of stress that teachers have been experiencing, and what further support is needed. The first question, explored in table 4 shows which aspects of members' working lives have caused them the greatest stress in the past 12 months.

Inadequate staffing levels/ staff shortages/ lack of cover / unfilled vacancies was the most mentioned source of stress in both nursery and special education and was within the top 3 most reported issues for primary education. The adoption of a 'business as usual' approach by management/ local authority at the same time as dealing with the pandemic was within the top 3 greatest causes of stress within both primary and secondary education. Meeting the additional support needs of pupils was another top 3 issue reported by primary, secondary, and special education members.

Anxiety regarding protection from infection at work was a top 3 issue for both nursery and special education and was also highly noted by those in the primary and secondary education sectors. Responses captured in the "other" answer option included the pressures from management to deliver new initiatives and raising attainment goals. There were several comments that reflected the paperwork demands that were placed on them, even outwith the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the comments noted that they found it very difficult to tick only 3 options from the list given as every single one of the options given caused them considerable stress. A few members also noted the stress they felt as they did not have a permanent post within their school, despite seeking this security.

Managing pupil behaviour was also noted as a considerable workload issue, especially for those working in secondary education. Violence in the classroom was also of notable concern within the findings outlined earlier. This was noted by just over a fifth of all members, although this reported by just under a third of those working in special education.

Again, members highlighted within this question the extra support they are providing to families in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the "other" option many comments made reference to the high levels of anxiety that parents are facing in relation to infection numbers at school. This has then further added to the stress of members as they regularly update parents and families to offer reassurance.

Table 4: Which of the following have created the greatest stress in the past 12 months? (Please tick the top 3 issues)[4]

	All responses	Primary education responses	Secondary education responses	Nursery education responses	Special education responses
Anxiety regarding protection from infection at work	41.7%	44.5%	36.7%	**54.6%**	**43.8%**
Keeping up to date with Scottish Government Covid safety guidance	15.9%	17.2%	12.6%	36.1%	16.9%
Managing Covid safety protocols	24.1%	23.2%	24.7%	**44.3%**	23.6%
Changes to pedagogy as a result of Covid protocols	28.7%	28.4%	30.8%	29.9%	19.7%
Responding to increased management requests related to the pandemic	24.8%	24.4%	26.5%	19.6%	20.3%
Adoption of a 'business as usual' approach by management/local authority at the same time as responding to the pandemic	**45.6%**	**49.5%**	**41.6%**	38.1%	38.8%
Managing the behaviour of students in the context of the pandemic	40.0%	36.4%	**49.8%**	16.5%	28.3%
Providing remote learning for absent pupils, whilst also teaching classes in school	30.9%	22.6%	**47.3%**	14.4%	21.5%
Meeting the additional support needs of pupils, including mental health-related support needs	**45.3%**	**51.3%**	37.5%	28.9%	**42.4%**
Violence/abuse in the classroom	17.8%	18.7%	15.7%	4.1%	27.2%
Additional Covid-related tasks which require training/professional learning	7.4%	7.7%	6.5%	10.3%	6.6%
Completing additional paperwork/admin/bureaucracy	30.8%	30.5%	33.7%	20.6%	22.3%
Inadequate staffing levels/ staff shortages/ lack of cover/ unfilled vacancies	**44.7%**	**45%**	40.9%	**69.1%**	**68.8%**
The physical environment of my workplace e.g. ventilation, heating, lighting, sound, insulation	13.9%	13.6%	12.9%	10.3%	16.7%
SQA procedures	10.0%	0.1%	27.1%	0%	2.9%
Other (please specify)	5.9%	5.7%	5.5%	7.2%	7.1%
Total responses	13,815				

At the end of this question there was the opportunity for members to leave additional comments. A total of 1,338 comments were noted highlighting many of the issues that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused as well

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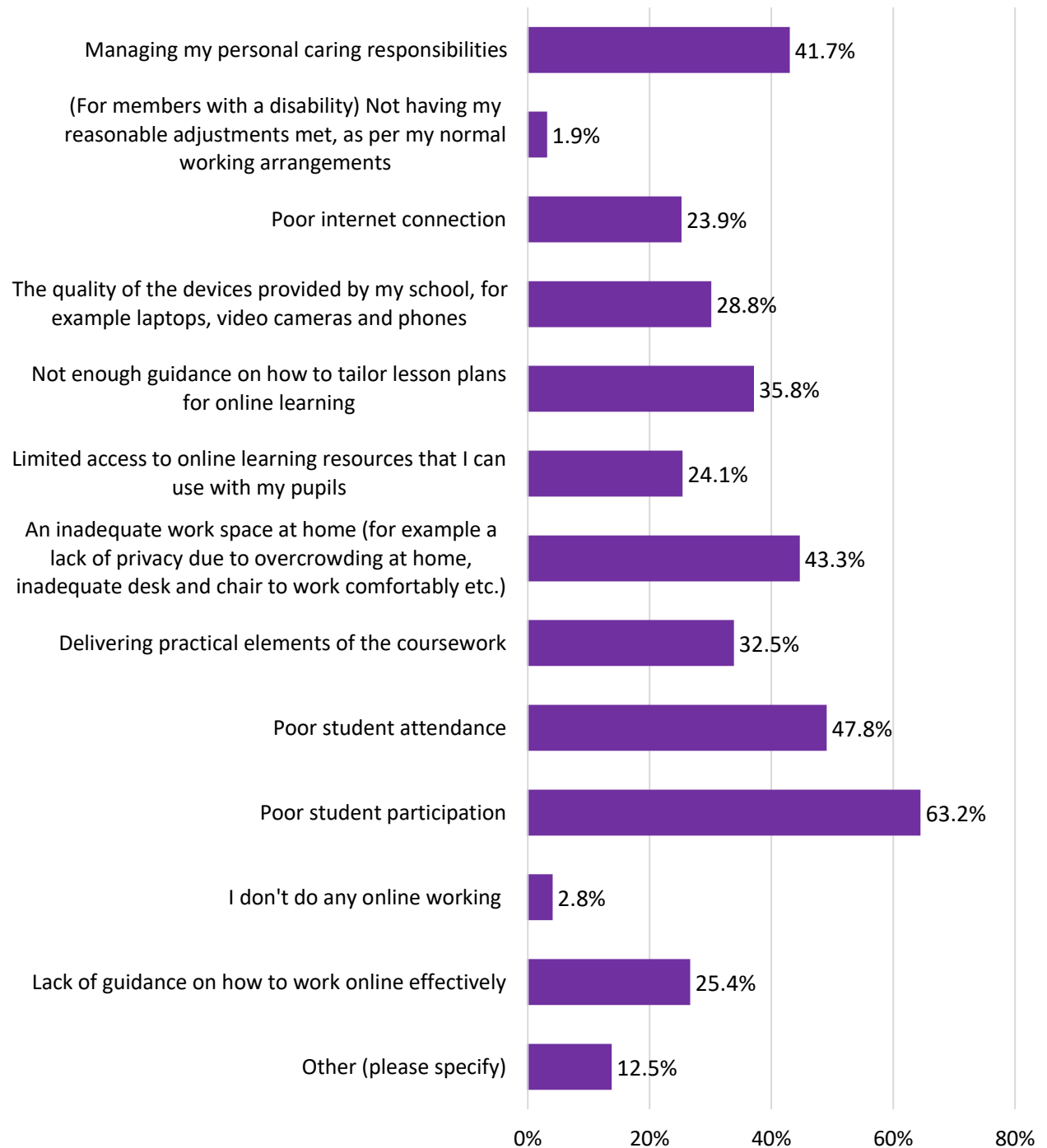[4] Top 3 highest responses in each column have been highlighted.

as the longstanding stressful issues within schools. Below is a sample of the comments left under this question.

Member comments on the sources of stress in the past 12 months

- "I have never submitted so many disciplinary referrals, nor seen so many children struggle just to get along with one another. I find the 'business as usual' expectation is unrealistic. Possibly more PSE instead of once per week would redress the lack of formal assemblies to cascade expectations to pupils."
- "I find having a positive case in my class very stressful, as I'm not seen as a close contact despite being in the same classroom as the child and teaching them. As I live with my parents (who are both over 60, and regularly see my grandparents (in their 80s and 90s) I then worry about if I am bringing covid into the home. I do my lateral flows, but then I know they aren't 100% accurate. Plus I have to distance myself as best as I can from the child and adults who work in my school, yet I am allowed to sit next to friends in a restaurant (which I try not to do, to reduce the chances of getting covid), but not having a social life then affects my mental health."
- "Teachers were 'key workers' when working through lockdown. No acknowledgement of this from management/ authority or pay offer. Disillusioned."
- "It is concerning why we are expected to plan for observations and have the threat of HMI hanging over us now as well as trying to operate as business as usual when we are still wearing masks and in the middle of a pandemic."
- "The last two years have been challenging but teachers and staff in schools have ensured young people got the best experience they could. There needs to be an acknowledgement of the amount of additional work staff undertook during this time."
- "There needs to be more support for teachers who are in their first year out of their probationer year. Going from having a mentor/supporter in the school as well as someone in the council to having no support is so difficult. Especially if you have had to change to a different level, stage, school, council area or all of these!"
- "As a pupil support teacher the amount of requests for access to mental health counselling has increased dramatically."
- "This year, in particular the impact of lockdowns is far more apparent. The children (P1) are coming to school without the same level of social skills, sharing, sitting quietly and listening, etc."
- "It's not the job it used to be and that makes me so very sad. My heart is still in the classroom but my head most definitely is not. The demand on teachers now is the greatest it has ever been and we are at burnout. We are trying to deal with teaching remotely and learning as we go, dealing with the mental health of our young people whilst trying to go about our job in a 'business as usual' way whilst remembering (or indeed, forgetting) that we have our own mental health and families to deal with. It is becoming impossible."
- "Every one of the items in q23 have added to a very stressful time. We know that many people have been working in similarly stressful workplaces however teachers find ourselves now increasingly under more and more pressure as we try once again to adapt to those in higher places thinking we can work miracles with kids that have huge gaps we will not be able to plug."

Next members were asked to detail the stresses related to extended online working. The full results of this question are displayed below in figure 16.

Figure 16: The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that many EIS members worked online for an extended period. What were the stresses of extended online working? (tick all that apply)

Category	Percentage
Managing my personal caring responsibilities	41.7%
(For members with a disability) Not having my reasonable adjustments met, as per my normal working arrangements	1.9%
Poor internet connection	23.9%
The quality of the devices provided by my school, for example laptops, video cameras and phones	28.8%
Not enough guidance on how to tailor lesson plans for online learning	35.8%
Limited access to online learning resources that I can use with my pupils	24.1%
An inadequate work space at home (for example a lack of privacy due to overcrowding at home, inadequate desk and chair to work comfortably etc.)	43.3%
Delivering practical elements of the coursework	32.5%
Poor student attendance	47.8%
Poor student participation	63.2%
I don't do any online working	2.8%
Lack of guidance on how to work online effectively	25.4%
Other (please specify)	12.5%

Total responses: 13,418

When looking at the stresses of extended online working, poor student attendance and participation was a key problem for the majority of respondents. Other notable sources of stress were managing personal caring responsibilities, and an inadequate workspace at home.

Within the "other" option members said they struggled to maintain a good work/life balance when their home also became their workplace. Members highlighted again the stresses that have occurred because of unrealistic expectations from managers or parents when learning was conducted online. Some respondents also noted that they had to provide some IT equipment themselves in order to facilitate their online working.

Some members also highlighted the strain of working at home during the school closures as they managed their own caring responsibilities for their own children or other family members.

There were also a few comments left from members who were students during the school closure period meaning that they did not get the same level of experience before moving into their probation year. Some also noted their physical health deteriorating at this time due to extended periods of sitting at a computer screen.

There were a further 954 comments left in response to this question below are a selection of those submitted.

Member comments on extended online learning

- "Staff should've been provided with technology to do their jobs. Many people spent their own money to ensure they could teach online. This is unacceptable."
- "Lack of separation between work/home, particularly in relation to pastoral care responsibilities."
- "We need to recognise that many families have limited access to digital resources. This is despite the number of social inclusion iPads that were given by the council to distribute to families."
- "Many children are now finding school difficult. The initial return was exciting for them, but many are struggling coming into school & want to be home with families- many of whom are still working from home."
- "This was very stressful and the amount of work and preparation teachers had to do in comparison with the uptake of pupils participating fully didn't match."
- "Colleagues helped each other through the stresses and obstacles. Very difficult delivering online live lessons when I have young children at home."
- "I spent £2000 on my own tech. My local authority were not forthcoming with devices. We still have inadequate devices in school. Some areas are high tech but this is not across the school. Pupil access to tech is particularly poor."
- "Whilst we were teaching from home we were still in the midst of an inspection cycle so we had the added burden from management to complete tasks & paperwork in preparation for our follow up visit."
- "We didn't get any CPD on online learning after the first lockdown. During the second one we were expected to teach new topics but with no skill base or resources. Very stressful."
- "Lack of clarity over what was expected of us - some were delivering online lessons, some weren't, some were told we weren't allowed to do live lessons, while others weren't told this. Lots of our resources had to be adapted or new ones created, which was massively time consuming."

Figure 17: In a typical week how often do you feel stressed within your job?
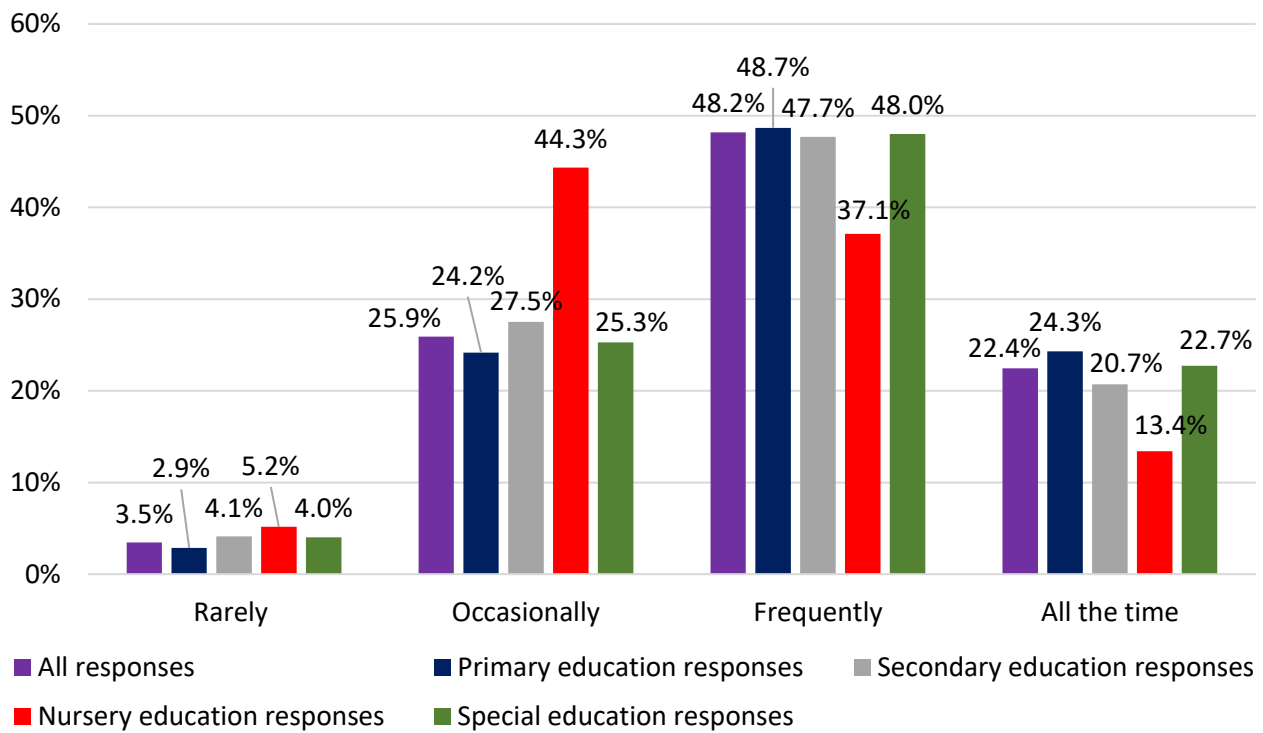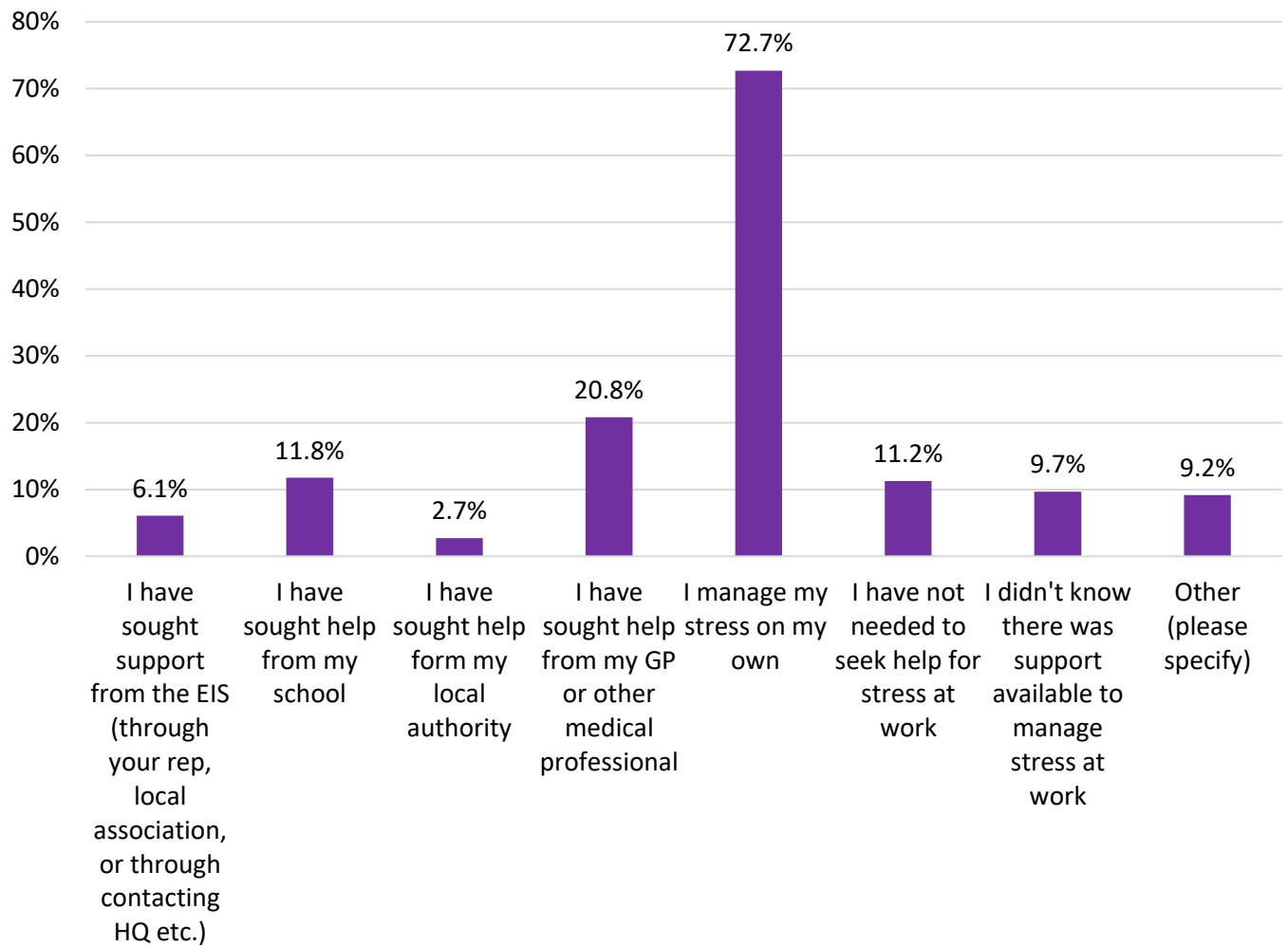

Total responses: 13,662

When asked how often they felt stressed within their job, members across all sectors reported high levels of stress. Over 70% of respondents said they felt stressed frequently or all of the time. Those working in the nursery sector were more likely to report that they felt stressed rarely or occasionally, however more than half of those working in nursery education said they felt stressed frequently or all of the time. These high levels of stress are not sustainable either for the individuals involved or for the teaching profession as a whole.

Members were then asked how they manage this stress (figure 18). The vast majority (73%) of respondents said that they manage this stress on their own, and only 3% said they had sought help from their local authority. Only 11% of respondents said they have not needed support for stress at work. This suggests that most of the teaching workforce not only needs support to manage the stresses of the job, but with so many managing this stress themselves they are also underserved in their professional environments.

**Figure 18: How have you managed your stress at work?**

Total responses: 13,586

One of the final questions within the survey asked EIS members what level of wellbeing they have in their job overall. Based on the high levels of stress and excessive workload demands that have been demonstrated throughout this report, it is not surprising that EIS members also reported poor wellbeing within their job. 50% of respondents noted their wellbeing at work as poor or very poor, and only a fifth said they had good or very good wellbeing within their job overall.

Members were invited to leave any further comments after this question, and a total of 922 further responses were collected. Many of the comments left highlight just how badly their wellbeing has been affected over the past 12 months of teaching. A selection of these comments has been included below.

Figure 19: What level of wellbeing would you say you feel within your job overall?
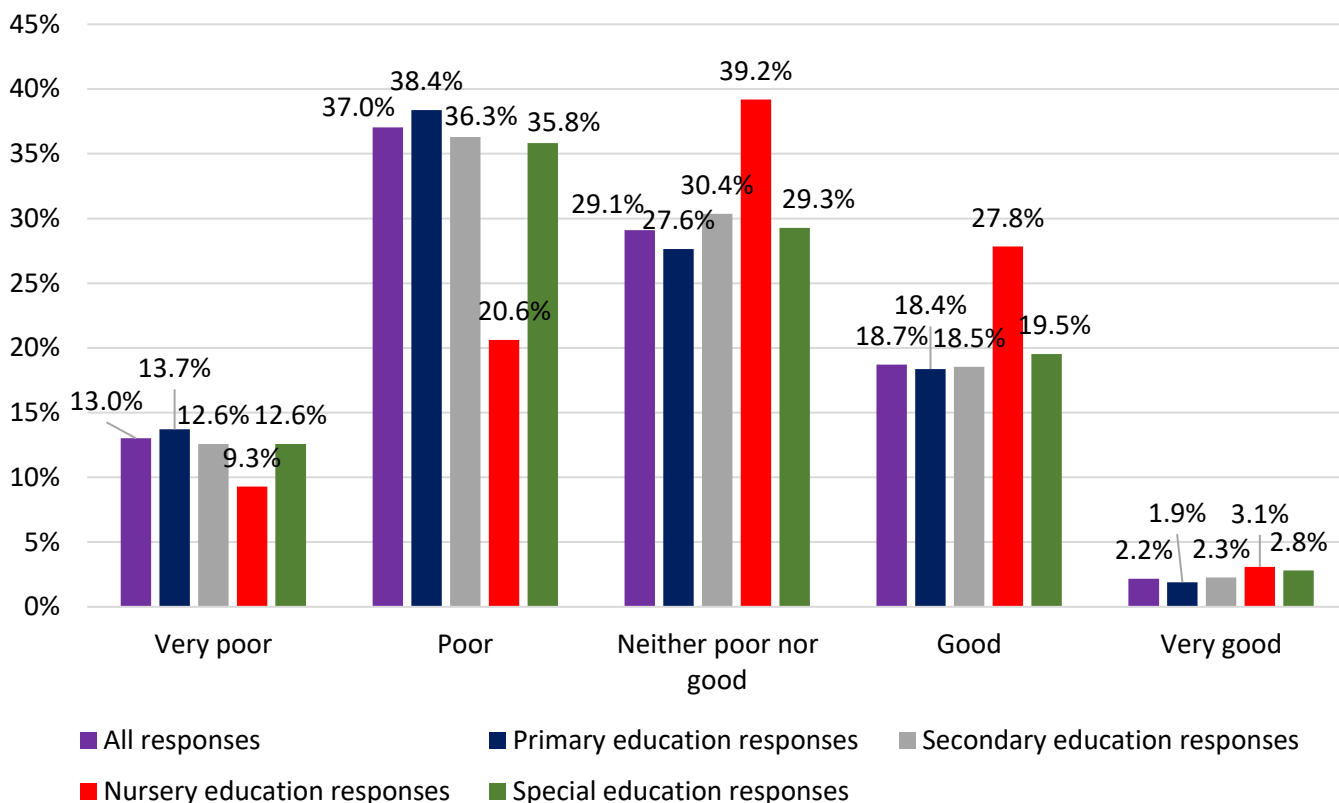

Total responses: 13,622

Member comments on their wellbeing

- "I'm very disappointed that a nurturing profession treats its staff this way."
- "I feel very supported by the rest of my SLT team but find my workload cannot possibly be managed within a 35 hour working week."
- "It feels like we are on a constant treadmill and never get to a point where things are done. Everything is tagged as being 'make this a priority' but everything is a priority."
- "Staff afraid to mention stress or that expectations are too high."
- "Love the kids and my colleagues. Stressed by everything else."
- "Great team in school. Don't find authority are realistic with demands- e.g. Assessment, tracking, attainment gaps, paperwork etc."
- "I have an excellent head of the department and we are a very strong team."
- "Don't feel we are being looked after properly."
- "HMIe visit caused stress during pandemic."
- "My life is centred on the class, my teaching practice, and focussing on the process of my probationary period. However, I do not feel this is sustainable beyond this or even the next year of teaching."
- "Just constantly feel lack of trust and understanding of the difficulties of the job from local authority and government. Constant initiatives and need for data, constantly being told to improve this or that. The staff or children's wellbeing is not at their centre as government are only interested in

figures, not creating a happy and trustworthy profession that does not need to constantly be checked up on or given something else to do or blamed for something in society."

The final question within the survey asked members how likely they would be to recommend teaching as a profession to take up. Almost 60% of respondents said they were unlikely or very unlikely to recommend teaching as a good profession to someone who is thinking of entering the profession. A small number of respondents ticked "other" as an option here, with some clarifying that with a lack of permanent contracts and suitable posts available many believe that it is harder to enter the profession at the moment. Others commented that the job can be far more enjoyable if working part-time hours. Some said that whilst they would recommend teaching, they would explain to anyone interested that going above and beyond has now become routine daily working.

Figure 20: How likely would you be to recommend teaching as a good profession to take up, to someone who is thinking of entering the profession?
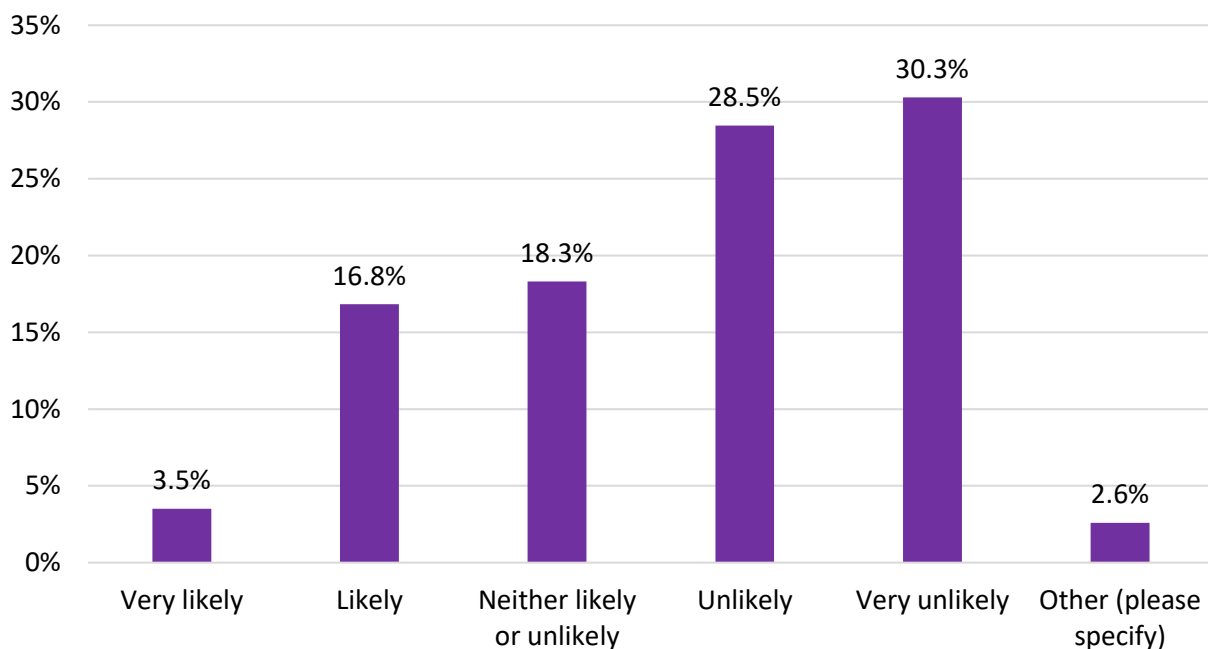
A further 2,021 additional comments were left under this question. Many of the comments received reflected on how much their job had changed not just during the COVID-19 pandemic, but also since they entered the profession. Many also highlighted the perceived rise in violence in the classroom, which has now become more commonplace within their working week. Again, members stated that they had passion for the job that they do, and the pupils that they support, but that the expectations of others have left them feeling jaded.

Member comments on recommending teaching

- "I love my job. I love the kids. I love to teach. I do not enjoy the pressure and ridiculous expectation that it has to become your whole life. I spend my own time and money so often at school that I actually wonder how my classroom functions at all within working hours or current budgets."
- "Teaching has changed so much over the last ten years. With the shift more towards active learning and away from textbooks this has caused a lot of teachers to spend additional time looking for ideas and resources. Added to that, behavioural issues where teachers are shouted and sworn at by pupils on a weekly basis is getting beyond a joke. I love teaching but have really felt disheartened by it recently due to lack of support for children with additional needs and children with behavioural problems."
- "The job has changed over the last few years. It is still a rewarding job and the young people are amazing, however, the job has become harder to manage. The pandemic has made it worse."
- "Teaching COULD be the most rewarding career in the world. However, a lot needs to change. I have seen so many supports being removed over the time I have been a teacher. The presumption of mainstream is cruel to those pupils who cannot cope, and unfair to those who have to tolerate continual disruption from pupils who cannot cope."
- "It used to be my dream job but with all the pressures and increasing work load it's hard to keep being motivated. I feel like I don't find time to look after myself and rest and recover. I'm always working for school at the weekend at least 4 hours."
- "I would not ever recommend this job as it stands just now. Far too much to do in the time available resulting in very poor work-life balance. Working a ridiculous number of hours overtime is the only way to keep on top of everything being asked of you."

Final Comments

Finally, this survey ended with a comments box, for members to leave any closing remarks. There were 1,286 comments generated from this, drawing attention to the many struggles that teachers are facing at present. Many highlighted that they just don't feel their job is doable at the moment, as they become more and more fatigued trying to deliver all that is expected of them.

Final member comments

- "My colleagues and I are committed to delivering an equitable education to all. Sad this doesn't feel achievable currently."
- "I am becoming very disenfranchised with a career I worked so hard to build. I feel guilty and upset about this. I am unsure of the solution at the moment and feel disappointed in myself for this too."
- "Mandatory health and wellbeing sessions in school miss the point - it's lip service to be seen to be supporting staff. Recognise the efforts people make and don't create unnecessary bureaucracy in an attempt to be seen to be doing something. Too many gimmicks."
- "Too many classes with many children needing additional or one to one help but only one teacher having to deal with behaviour problems and learning needs."
- "We are increasingly confronted with behaviour issues and don't have enough staff (PSA) to support in class. With so many staff off all the time this pressure gets even worse, and the children don't get the support they would need. It often feels like firefighting instead of teaching."
- "For the first time ever, I am seriously contemplating leaving teaching. The strain on physical and mental health is just overwhelming at the moment. I don't feel like a teacher. The pressure to cover absence is just unacceptable and one our authority needs to take responsibility for. What have they done with recovery funds? Certainly not supported staffing levels."
- "With increased expectations, Leadership teams are on their knees."
- "I feel that the EIS has been the leading source of Covid related procedure information during the pandemic and I hear from you before I hear from school about changes or updates. I am grateful for the work you do for us."
- "Please address the increased teacher workload in relation to taking on students during these current times."
- "We have not kept ahead of inflation enough. Moving forward I, and very many of my colleagues would welcome a good pay rise and take part in industrial action to make our point. Too many good people are leaving, we can't recruit nor retain, and the vicious circle is putting lives at risk."
- "Teaching has completely morphed into an admin job. Huge, huge amount of time colour coding online tracking. Planning has become ridiculously complicated, so many things to underline and highlight that it is difficult to actually remember what you are covering. Half of it doesn't get done properly, as the amount to be covered is completely unrealistic."

Further Information

For more information on any of the themes within this report please contact:

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Member advice and support can be found here:

https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/Advice

For more information on the health and wellbeing support available:

https://www.eis.org.uk/Member-Support/HWResource

Professional Learning Opportunities:

https://www.eis.org.uk/Meetings-And-Events/Courses

For more information on the Educational Institute of Scotland:

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