

School staff pay – how are academies responding to national recommendations?

11 December 2023

We're pleased to publish the results of our annual Teacher Pay Survey, which now encompasses support staff pay.

This is our third year of capturing and understanding what trusts intend to do in relation to national decisions on staff pay. We're pleased to have received over 100 responses, representing trusts from all regions of the country, providing a strong dataset to provide valuable insight.

Valuable insight

Although academies do not need to follow nationally agreed terms and conditions, including pay, results show that the majority are doing so, predominantly it would seem, to aid recruitment and retention.

However, there is a greater degree of variance for support staff with a greater number of trusts moving away from the NJC Green Book pay increase, citing a lack of financial control and desire for greater flexibility.

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The Pay Survey 2023 closed on 30 November 2023 and 103 respondents took part, representing trusts from across all regions of the country. The survey did not require a forced response to each question.

Introduction

This is our third year of capturing and understanding what trusts intend to do in relation to national decisions on teacher pay and this year we are pleased to have added questions about support staff pay to our annual salary. We are delighted that over 100 responses were received (up from the 79 received last year), indicating that it is clearly a subject of interest.

30% of responses came from multi academy trusts of between 6 and 10 academies, with single academies also being large in number (24%), with the majority of trusts having mixed education phases.

Analysis

Although academies do not need to follow nationally agreed terms and conditions, including pay, it is clear that most are continuing to do so. This may be due to the size of the organisations who responded to our survey (i.e., smaller trusts compared to larger trusts).

In relation to the implementation of STPCD 2023, the vast majority (99%) are increasing pay in line with the recommendations, which was similar to the position in last year's survey. This was also the position in 2021.

Interestingly, 1% of respondents (one trust) this year intend to increase pay, but below the STPCD recommendation.

Like last year, the results this year suggest there is little interest in departing from the national pay scales and increases for trusts to create their own teacher pay scale. The majority of respondents stated that the reason for this is that they wanted to continue to follow STPCD recommendations (84%). Another reason is the ability to be able to recruit talent competitively (51%), indicating that paying national rates of pay is likely to ensure this.

Automatic pay progression

Similarly, there is little change with regards to moving towards automatic pay progression. In 2022, 60.53% of respondents linked pay to performance compared to an increase of 66% of respondents this year. However, there was also an increase in those planning to change to automatic pay progression from last year (9.21% in 2022 and 11% in 2023). 90% of respondents said they will continue to follow STPCD pay ranges and have no plans to create their own pay scale which is a reduction of 2% compared to last year. So perhaps there is an emerging trend to make some changes.

There are also some interesting comments captured in the survey, including one comment where the Main Pay Range has been split into half points so that they can be more flexible with progression.

Support staff

In relation to support staff, the results show that 89% of respondents still adopt the NJC Green Book pay scale for support staff, with 11% having moved away from NJC.

Of note is the difference between the total number of respondents who applied the STPCD pay increase for teachers in full this year, at 99%, against the NJC pay increase for support staff, which was much lower at 88%.

9% of trusts either applied for a lower overall increase to support staff pay this year or remained undecided at the time of completing the survey with regards to what they intended to do. Commentary and insights from trusts highlight, that considerations around overall affordability is impacting the sector here. However, it is noted that 3% of the trusts who responded applied an increase to support staff pay above that of the NJC increase this year.

These results are indicative of the complex factors influencing decisions around support staff pay in the sector. The survey results show that a larger proportion of trusts have already moved away from NJC pay for support staff, at 11%, as opposed to STPCD for teachers, at 5%.

Greater financial control

Commentary to the survey suggests that factors around having greater financial control are an important consideration, at 18%, but so too are wider factors around the design of pay scales across trusts. Of note is commentary around the lack of flexibility within the NJC pay scale to accommodate senior and executive support staff roles within trusts, with some respondents looking to add additional pay points to their existing

pay scales or design a new pay scale to address this need. 14% of the responses about potentially moving away from the NJC pay scale were associated with the need for greater flexibility.

Other factors highlighted by the survey relate to considerations for multi-county trusts and trusts with out of county growth plans owing to the nature of local collective bargaining and pay scale design across NJC support staff pay. Of the respondents thinking of moving away from NJC pay for support staff, 22% say this relates to considerations around equal pay, with commentary suggesting that some trusts are experiencing challenges with the design, application and management of support staff pay across the trust where multiple pay scales exist (presumably inherited local authority grading structures).

On a final point here is commentary to suggest some trusts are considering the impact of inequality between teaching pay and support staff pay increases, with this point influencing their decision to potentially move away from NJC pay for support staff.

Reward strategy: key considerations

Although the survey shows the appetite continues to be to follow STPCD and NJC, it is important to note that trusts do have options in relation to pay in the future and should consider this as part of a wider reward strategy. For example, you may want to:

- Create your own approach to pay. This could improve recruitment and retention, and whilst the unions may not like a shift away from the national position, that shouldn't put you off from creating an employment value proposition that really works for your organisation. It is interesting to note that the teacher unions are keen on trusts de-coupling the link between pay and progression, even though that is a key element of STPCD.
- Adopt a hybrid approach, with some reference to STPCD or NJC terms but putting in place more flexibilities that allow you to reward your staff for the work they do in different ways. Any variances from national terms would be set out in the contract of employment. After TUPE, STPCD becomes contractual for teachers. Depending on the wording of the teacher contract, new STPCD terms may not

automatically apply, giving you more flexibility to set different terms. The NJC is a collective agreement that transfers, but the agreement is static at the point of transfer which means there is no automatic right to have subsequent editions/revisions to that collective agreement unless you have voluntarily decided to adopt these collective agreements. Our advice is that you should check the wording in your contracts to determine whether subsequent changes to national terms and conditions would be applied automatically.

Conclusion

It will be interesting to see whether the trend for more trusts to have moved away from NJC as opposed to STPCD continues to grow, and to see if more trusts move away from the link between pay and performance, as the survey results indicates that there is some interest in doing this. In any event, it is good practice to regularly review your appraisal systems to ensure they are improving and developing performance which is the purpose.

Your reward strategy should meet your needs. Following the STPCD and NJC is perfectly reasonable, but it's still important to consider other options that may be appropriate now or sometime in the future as your organisation develops.

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Related expertise

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