

Teacher shortages

Steep rise in schools in England recruiting teachers from Jamaica

Exclusive: Schools following NHS and social care in recruiting from overseas as work visas for secondary school teachers double

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Children at a prep school in Falmouth, Jamaica. The country is facing a severe teacher shortage. Photograph: John A Allen, Jr./Alamy

Schools are following the NHS and social care providers by increasing their recruitment of teachers from overseas to fill vacancies, leaving classrooms empty in countries such as [Jamaica](#).

Immigration figures show a jump in the number of skilled worker visas issued to teachers from abroad, while the government in England is using bonuses to boost the number of teacher trainees from overseas - at a time when Rishi Sunak said [legal migration to the UK was “too high”](#) and vowed to reduce it.

While the numbers remain modest compared with the NHS, the trend is rising steeply upwards and will continue rising as the increase in trainee teachers recruited overseas enter the workforce.

Last year nearly 1,100 work visas were issued to qualified secondary school teachers, double the 555 visas issued in 2022 and well above the 205 in 2021. So far this year, more than one in four applicants to teacher training courses in [England](#) have come from outside Europe.

Jamaica alone supplied 486 qualified teachers last year, twice as many as in 2022, as schools in England launched recruiting drives in a country with a population of just 2.8 million and suffering its own chronic shortages of qualified teachers.

Emiliana Vegas, a professor of practice at Harvard’s graduate school of education, said: “The reality is that, from the perspective of a Jamaican teacher, moving to the UK to work is economically a good idea. Salaries and working conditions are much better in the UK than in most low- and middle-income countries, like Jamaica.

“But for Jamaican society, it has the impact of pulling away scarce talent, thus perpetuating the challenge of raising education quality in Jamaica and similar countries and increasing the gaps in student learning between high- and low-income societies.”

Leighton Johnson, a headteacher and president of the [Jamaica Teachers’ Association](#), said teacher shortages were so severe that some schools had vacancies unfilled for over a year, with the government allowing retired teachers, untrained specialists and even teachers on holiday to be hired.

In other cases, Jamaican schools were cutting subjects because they could

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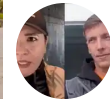
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not find qualified teachers, while others had resorted to sharing teachers.

“Schools have had to be very creative. Some in close proximity have been designing their timetables to ensure a teacher can serve two schools, and some schools are utilising technology where a teacher can be in one school and streamed to another so the students can benefit,” Johnson said.

“These are the extents that many schools have had to go to in order to make it work.”

While teachers from Jamaica are often sought by schools in the US, Canada and the Middle East, because of their training and language skills, Johnson said there had been increasingly “aggressive” recruitment by countries including England, using advertising, holding seminars or directly approaching teachers in Jamaica, with higher rates of pay being offered.

“What I know for a fact is that these recruiters, they network and once they have an individual from Jamaica, they employ these individuals, they employ teachers, to assist in the recruiting process. So they’ll say, get your colleagues to come, you be the testimonial, help us to recruit. And they become the point person, they are given a stipend or salary or some kind of remuneration, to get other teachers to come,” Johnson said.

Schools in England that have directly recruited from Jamaica include those in the Harris Federation academy chain, based around London.

Last year, Schools Week reported that the [Harris Federation flew staff to the island to hold interviews](#), and hired 50 teachers mainly in science and maths. Dan Moynihan, the federation’s chief executive, said at the time: “We recruit Jamaican teachers who are fantastic people, but we are having to do that because we can’t find teachers here.”

UK health and social care organisations cannot actively recruit qualified staff from countries on the [World Health Organization’s “red list”](#), which includes Zimbabwe and Nigeria. But there are no similar barriers to hiring teachers: 60 UK work visas were issued to teachers from Nigeria last year, up from six in 2022, while Zimbabwe’s total rose from 11 to 59.

Daniel Kebede, the general secretary of the National Education Union, said: “The aggressive recruitment of teachers from other countries can have a significant impact on their ability to deliver good quality education to the children there and that is why the government needs to address the causes of not being able to recruit and retrain sufficient UK trained teachers.”

The focus on overseas recruitment comes as schools in England report acute teacher shortages in some subjects. Record numbers [quit the profession last year](#) and experts at the National Foundation for Educational Research have warned that teacher supply “is in a critical state that risks the quality of education”.

The Department for Education (DfE) in England has sought to meet its targets for trainee teachers by [recruiting more from overseas](#), introducing a £10,000 “international relocation package” for physics and modern foreign languages teachers, as well as easing requirements for applicants from countries including Jamaica, India and others to gain qualified teacher status.

A DfE spokesperson said its international recruitment “aims to support the best qualified applicants from abroad to make valuable contributions” to its workforce.

“Our recruitment and retention strategy will always be focused domestically and schools in England now have more teachers than ever before with nearly 470,000 teachers in the workforce, a 27,000 increase on 2010,” the spokesperson said.

“We are focused on striking the right balance between acting decisively to tackle net migration, which we are clear is far too high, and retaining and

developing highly skilled teachers.”

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, warned against schools following the health and social care sectors in using “short-term, sticking plaster” solutions.

“Recruitment from overseas is workload intensive, costly, and bureaucratic for hard-pressed schools. Often, international teachers only stay a short time, as they may not be granted indefinite leave to remain or permitted to bring their families, adding to teacher churn which is bad for pupils,” Whiteman said.

“Ministers must do more to make teaching a more attractive and sustainable profession that will inspire people to commit to decades-long careers.”

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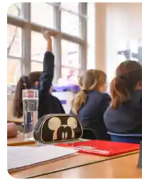
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