

Securing the 21st Century Teacher Workforce: Global perspectives on teacher motivation and retention

wise

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مؤتمر القمة العالمي للابتكار في التعليم

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Executive Summary

As a diverse global team, we are deeply committed to finding ways to better understand and, in turn, support education systems as they strive to improve. We recognize that while each education system faces unique challenges, the recruitment, development, and retention of teachers emerges consistently as a common international priority. We have noted one recurring and—in most countries—escalating educational concern: teacher shortage. While the discussions about access to education continue, many jurisdictions are now turning to, possibly, more productive conversations about teacher knowledge and skill development. These systems are actively seeking strategies to improve overall teacher effectiveness and retain experts in the classroom. The importance of a knowledgeable, skilled, and motivated teacher cadre remains almost undisputed. However, in many countries, this most important of assets is often underrepresented in progressive policy discussions designed to manage and secure the future education workforce.

We acknowledge that recruitment is important, especially in systems with rapidly rising student intakes and low public perceptions of teachers. We strongly believe that not enough attention is being paid to motivating and developing teachers to support their full participation in the education system, including collaborating with peers and informing the policies that influence their work and lives. Similarly, much policy and research attention focuses on teacher recruitment. We believe that caring for teachers and creating inspiring and supportive working conditions will support the retention of teachers we already have in our systems. Teacher retention needs to become a high policy and research priority.

The collaboration between our University College London Institute of Education-based (UCL IOE) team and STIR Education emerged over several years as we independently, and at times collectively, worked to understand and improve education systems in our respective contexts. Throughout our discussions, we recognized our converging interest in pushing our collective understanding of how different systems address issues of teacher and leader recruitment, development, and retention. From STIR's perspective, we bring an interest in motivation at all levels of the system, from the child and the teacher to district- and central level government officials to thereby enable sustained improvements in teaching practice and student learning. From UCL IOE's perspective, we bring an interest in how systems create conditions that inspire teachers to remain in the profession. Together we bring an interest in exploring systems that are just beginning to reshape their approaches to teacher professional workforce management.

Teachers play the central and most important role in assuring their students', schools' and system-wide success. The core purpose of our WISE-funded *Securing the 21st century teacher workforce* project is to reflect on how different jurisdictions are approaching their very individual, yet often shared, challenges in securing their current and future teacher cadre. We set out to learn more about how systems design processes and structures to recruit, train, develop, and retain the high quality teachers their students deserve. There is much to be learned by examining different systems, with different approaches, to share strategies and “identify challenges and possible opportunities. Our six jurisdictional studies do just that.

The Study

The purpose of the *Securing the 21st century teacher workforce* project is to explore how governments, states, districts, schools, and non-governmental actors are working to support teachers, with a sharp focus on the relationship between teacher motivation and teacher retention. We gathered and interrogated evidence and experiences from systems that are working, in various ways, to harness motivation and support teachers and leaders. Additionally, we sought to understand the factors and system-wide conditions that influence teacher motivation, particularly in the light of the urgency of reigniting this motivation to create sustained improvements in student learning.

The *Securing the 21st Century Teacher Workforce* study is an innovative co-created and co-curated international project. The project was designed, from the start, to be curatorial in nature. We wanted to bring together a team of global researchers to begin to shine light on how different education systems were approaching the opportunities and challenges of securing their future education professionals. We did not have the scope to be able to spend time in schools and districts in each jurisdiction. However, we did have the amazing opportunity to begin to construct a deeper understanding of some of the most interesting educational jurisdictions in the world at national, province/state, and city level. Following the publication of the report, we will launch a blog series featuring interviews with researchers and policy leaders from each system as well as a Thought Leader interview series. Our goal is to curate a unique contribution to global conversations about teacher motivation and retention.

We took a multi-layered approach to understanding teacher motivation, retention, and professionalism. In each jurisdiction, we established university or NGO-based research teams, which conducted jurisdictional policy studies based on publicly available documents. In turn, we set out to focus on how a small group of educational policy leaders and advocates from government, non-governmental organizations, and unions understand the state of their educational system and its influence on teacher motivation, development, and retention. We conducted semi-structured interviews with key policy leaders to explore and interrogate evidence emerging from the policy studies. The resulting studies illustrate how various stakeholders understand the state of each education system and their perspectives on the factors and conditions that influence teacher motivation, professionalism, and retention.

Jurisdictional selection criteria were also varied and resulted in our selection of two jurisdictions continuously recognized by PISA for performance (Ontario, Shanghai) and four recognized for their innovative approaches to recruiting, developing, motivating, and/or retaining teachers (Uganda, India, Jordan, and Scotland).

The questions guiding the project in each jurisdiction are:

- What are the policies and practices designed to influence teacher work, motivation, and retention?
- How do policy and practice leaders describe the current state of the profession?
- What factors and conditions do policy and practice leaders believe contribute to the current state of the teacher workforce?
- Are there specific policies and/or strategies in place, or planned in the future, to improve the factors and conditions that influence teacher work, recruitment, development, motivation, and retention?

The Report

To frame our work across the six jurisdictions and our proffered reflections on *Securing the 21st century teacher workforce*, our report begins with a detailed description of how and why we selected our six study jurisdictions. More specifically, we were intrigued to know more about jurisdictions consistently doing well on international league tables. We wanted also to include systems that were actively creating innovative partnerships and strategies to improve teacher work and lives and student outcomes, but which may have yet to achieve their ambitions fully. To recognize the vastly different contexts around the world, we explicitly selected very different education systems within which to examine local, national, and global structures and perceptions of the health of the teaching profession. To this end, our global team set out to take snapshots of teacher-focused policy and practice at three levels: country level (Jordan, Scotland, Uganda), province/state level (Ontario, Uttar Pradesh), and city level (Shanghai).

We provide a quick review of recent intergovernmental and agency reports to frame the emerging narrative around teacher motivation, commitment, and professionalism that appears to be gaining increasing political and practical traction. In turn, we draw on current and historic academic research to define and inform the design and analysis of the jurisdictional studies. While there are limitations to any review conducted and presented in such limited space, we have selected the themes and ideas that most closely and consistently resonate with the national and local discussions about ensuring desirable and manageable careers for teachers to ensure teacher wellbeing and retention. These include: motivation; recruitment; retention; autonomy; professionalization; commitment; self-efficacy; professional learning; and, wellbeing.

Emerging Findings from Our Studies

Studies align with the themes explored in both the 20-year policy reviews and interviews with between 8-15 policy leaders in each system. Studies include the following sections: State of the Profession and Public Discourse; Education Policy and Strategy; Teacher Recruitment; Teacher Career Paths; Teacher Retention; Teacher Motivation; Teacher Professionalism; and, Teacher Wellbeing.

The studies demonstrate that motivation is complex and contextually specific. Each system defines common terms in their own way and is creating policy strategies to address their specific needs. Echoing the calls for greater attention to the working lives of teachers, the empirical and policy evidence presented in the studies identifies various perceptions of and approaches to supporting teachers at different stages of their careers. Teacher motivation is clearly not exclusively intrinsic. Opportunities to participate in decision-making, collaboration with peers, and school and system-level structures coalesce to create the conditions that can contribute to improved teacher motivation. Teachers at different life and career stages and in different geographical contexts demand different types of support to reach and sustain peak performance. Drawing on the range of aforementioned evidence sets, we posit eight observations with embedded policy and research recommendations that we believe will contribute to nurturing, sustaining, and retaining motivated teacher talent to support jurisdictions as they work to secure their 21st century workforces. These include:

1. Teacher motivation matters.
2. Highly (school-based) decentralized systems may need to work harder at retention.
3. Cooperation at the top of the system, matters.
4. Public perception of teachers, schools, and education, matters.
5. Opportunities to collaborate at school and across schools, matters.
6. Autonomy gains importance in the context of collaboration.
7. Beyond career ladders: ladders are helpful, but are they the only solution?
8. One size does not fit all when it comes to incentives and rewards.
9. Strategic collaboration supports the design and implementation of new policies.

Policy and Research Recommendations

Drawing from the cases and our roster of observations, the report puts forward a set of policy and research recommendations that we believe will contribute to securing the 21st Century teacher workforce by recruiting and retaining motivated teachers. The advice sets out our key aspirations for policy leaders as they continue to build and refine their teacher workforce policies. Many of our policy recommendations require robust evidence to inform the design and implementation phase. In turn, we provide research colleagues with our most pressing questions related to the system-level management of teacher motivation, commitment and retention. Explored in more detail in the full report, we focus our advice to policymakers and researchers on the following priority areas of interest and action.

Recommendations for Policymakers

- Initiate differentiated teacher motivation supports and interventions that reflect regional, career stage, and generational differences.
- Adopt system-specific strategies to mitigate possible structural retention challenges.
- Make high-level cooperation between leading actors and agencies a governmental priority.
- Prioritize positive public perception of and confidence in the system.
- Curate purposeful and meaningful opportunities for teachers to learn from each and with each other and inform the system.
- Galvanize discussions on teacher-informed evidence-based strategies to support teacher autonomy and motivation.
- Adopt career structures and strategies that reflect the needs and desires of the newer generations of educators.
- Differentiate and innovate when seeking solutions to teacher motivation.
- Create positive system-wide policy habits and expectations.

Recommendations for Researchers

- Investigate system-level support strategies to enhance teachers' motivation, accounting for variations in generational, regional, and career and life stages.
- Explore possible relationships between system-level structures and teacher retention.

- Broadly examine the process and impact of high-level cooperation and its potential influence for educators and educational outcomes.
- Investigate relationships between positive public perception of the teaching profession and recruitment and teacher retention.
- Develop a richer knowledge of how generational, life course and jurisdictional factors influence educator career motivations.

Conclusions

The opportunity to explore the education policy and practice context of one jurisdiction is an honor. Working across six countries, province/states, and districts simultaneously is an honor and an adventure. When we set out, our intention was to understand more about the structures and systems that influence the work and lives of teachers. We wanted to venture into jurisdictions that are rarely studied as well as those that are firmly cemented as go-to destinations of interesting practice. We wanted to test our own assumptions by conducting, almost, a system- and policy-level health check of the teaching profession. We visited jurisdictions in high and lower income countries. While there are radical differences in the opportunities and challenges facing their education systems, they all share the essential need for a strong and motivated teacher workforce to help deliver their educational ambitions. Our selection of jurisdictions was partly to demonstrate that it is possible to learn about and absorb the lessons from every jurisdiction.

The purpose of this project is to explore how governments, states, districts, schools, and non-governmental actors are working to support teachers, with a sharp focus on the relationship between teacher motivation and teacher retention. We gathered and interrogated evidence and experiences from systems that are working to harness motivation and support teachers and leaders. Additionally, we sought to understand the factors and system-wide conditions that influence teacher motivation, particularly in the light of the urgency of reigniting teacher motivation to improve student learning in a sustained manner. Our focus on motivation nests in our prolonged passion for understanding and addressing teacher recruitment, development, and retention.

Our Next Steps with WISE to Support the Project

For our IOE UCL and STIR teams, gathering the evidence for this report is only one strand of how we intended to contribute to the discussions and actions related to the nine observations above. At IOE UCL, with STIR support, through our website we will be curating a series of Thought Leader interviews and blog posts from across participating countries and will also include other leading thinkers and doers on motivation and retention in the education sector. All resources will be available on our website, which will launch in February 2018. STIR colleagues, in collaboration with education experts globally, are continuing to collaborate with the governments of India and Uganda to carefully test and learn about innovative and contextualized approaches to improve motivation at all levels of the education system, while simultaneously building capacity in these education systems to scale and sustain these approaches. By doing so, STIR intends to support governments and organizations with practical learning towards financing, implementing, and measuring effective approaches to improving teacher motivation and thereby impacting student learning.



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