



PS People
By IRIS

Insight Paper Generational differences in the teaching profession

Improving teacher happiness and engagement



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Executive summary

With more generations than ever coexisting in the school workplace, it's crucial to put measures in place that will keep them all happy and engaged.

Our nationwide survey found that each generation has unique expectations of school employment, so targeted strategies that aim to cater for these expectations can help you to build a well-rounded and diverse teaching workforce. This has huge benefits to schools, improving the provision of education across the board.

As members of these cohorts were raised with different cultures and approaches to work, this may feel like a balancing act. Sometimes, employee's workplace values can be at odds with each other, leaving staff dissatisfied with their colleagues' work ethics. This means that if you try to appease staff by appealing to the wider cultural values of their generation, you may alienate other members of staff.

Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to keep everybody happy:

- ▶ Offer opportunities for career progression
- ▶ Introduce two-way mentoring initiatives
- ▶ Care for your staff with pastoral and mentoring services

While generational theory can offer simple solutions to teacher happiness, it shouldn't be relied on in a vacuum. Instead, a balanced approach that considers the needs of everybody – with the help of generational theory – is the best way to care for your staff and keep them engaged with the school.

Introduction

For the first time, we have four generations of teacher working side by side. People are retiring later and even reentering the workforce; in fact, almost 35% of returning teachers are aged 45 and over (Department for Education, 2018).

This poses a unique new challenge for school HR departments. Members of different generations can have vastly different attitudes towards authority, technology, employment and the workplace. This phenomenon is outlined by Strauss and Howe's generational theory (1991).

Generational theory

This theory goes deeper than stereotypical pop culture descriptions of generational traits. Instead, sociologists use generational theory as a predictor of people's behaviour in society – and for good reason. Those who belong to the same generation have shared the same formative years, historical events and cultural phenomena. Over time, the weight of these shared experiences can affect people's actions and shape their interactions with others (Noble and Schewe, 2003).

Each generational name is a shorthand that refers to decades of changing opinions and attitudes. Anecdotally, this is why older baby boomer colleagues may regard younger millennials as lazy or undriven, even if this isn't necessarily true – in this example, the millennial's attitude is counter to the baby boomer's workplace values. While the baby boomer colleague may place a stronger value on long hours and harder work, the millennial colleague instead values working smarter and leveraging technological advances to improve efficiency, so they may not put in the long hours that the baby boomer colleague would expect.

To find out how generational theory can be applied to the education sector, we undertook a survey of teaching staff from schools around the UK to find out each age category's attitudes towards teaching and what motivates them at work. Staff chose from the options visibility and recognition, loyalty to my school, training and professional development, working with and improving the community, opportunities for career progression and a sense of competition, and also had the opportunity to write their own personal motivations in a free text field. These findings can be seen below in the section "Motivating, retaining and recruiting teachers from four generations".

A pinch of salt

While it's important to steer away from mass generalisations and stereotyping, it's undeniable that people from each generational group will have grown up with different expectations and as part of a different environment. There's also marked differences in the education they have received. These factors all contribute to people's teaching technique and what they expect from a working environment.

When you consider the huge number of employees a school can have, generations can be a great indicator for what your employee's needs and wants will be. To stay competitive, employers need to consider catering for everybody's needs in the workplace, and generational needs are no different.

Generational tensions

Unfortunately, we all form judgements of one another based on a range of factors, and age is no exception. For employers, it's important to work through employee's inherent generational biases – for example, the recently surfacing belief that the actions of baby boomers have made life more difficult for subsequent generations. Younger generations have responded with the “OK Boomer” meme, which seeks to discredit baby boomer beliefs by making them seem out of touch. While this may seem like it's in jest, there's no room for ageism or negative stereotyping in the workplace, and these beliefs are often born out of misunderstandings.

With that said, these broader generational terms can be a useful tool for employers who are looking to improve employee satisfaction. Generally speaking, because of the life events that are shared by each generation, members of each cohort will seek different benefits and experiences from employment.



Generational diversity benefits

Why worry about attracting or retaining teachers from different generational groups? The fact is, the more diverse your workforce, the better suited it is to solving problems as they emerge.

The commercial world has proven for decades that, in general, having a greater mix of people can lead to better decision-making. In the context of a school, this means a more balanced education for your students.

Commercial business Cloverpop conducted research that found a more diverse team will make better decisions up to 87% of the time. When you consider the mission-critical decisions that teaching teams have to make every day, such as curriculum planning, it's easy to see how this can have a profound impact on student attainment.

Therefore, it's important to make everybody happy in the teaching workforce by considering the things they value from their employer. This helps schools to attract the most diverse workforce possible.

Generational awareness

A Turkish study of schoolteachers concluded that, if school administrators can hire a diverse team and work to bridge generational gaps and misunderstandings, teachers will be more productive and student attainment will improve (Polat, Çelik and Okçu, 2019)

They found that teachers of different generations have different strengths and weaknesses in the

classroom which, when combined as part of a team, can cancel each other out. Therefore, it's important to nurture teachers' awareness of their colleagues' values and ways of working. Initiatives that aim to bridge these gaps are essential and hugely beneficial. One of the best ways to foster this awareness is through mentoring and even reverse mentoring, in which younger colleagues can share their perspectives and skillset with older colleagues.



"When managers and coworkers do not understand each other's generational differences, tension increases and job satisfaction and productivity decrease. Therefore, managers and co-workers must adopt a generational perspective, that is, become more sensitive to and understanding of generational differences."

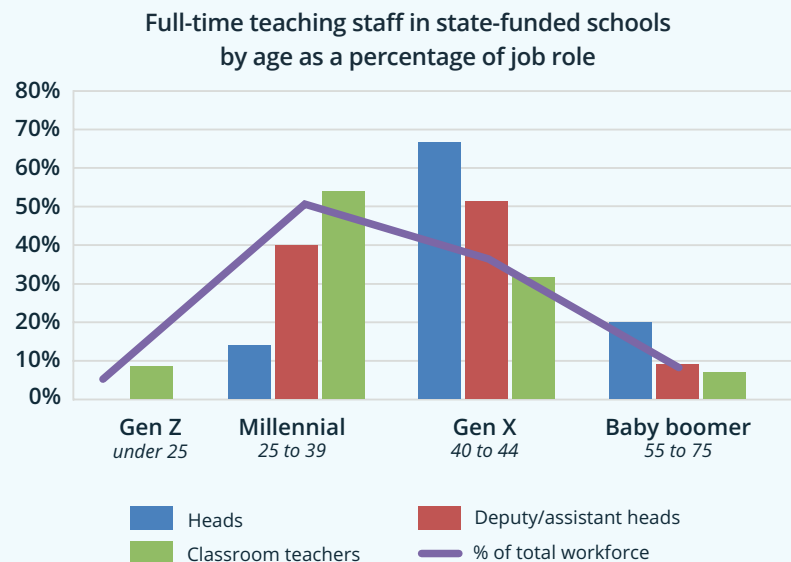
Kupperschmidt, 2000

The generational breakdown in the teaching workforce

Statistics taken from the School Workforce Census 2018. Generational ages are taken from Pew Research Center data.

A caveat

It's not this paper's aim to point out the age disparity in leadership roles, as there are myriad other factors that contribute to this. Instead, the fact that older generations trend towards leadership roles showcases an interesting difference in the way they are currently working; ultimately, this could influence their attitudes at work. In most cases, age disparity is not the effect of generational differences, but rather the outcome of natural career progression and will change over time.



The teacher workforce is in a state of change

Once considered to be children, millennials (aged 25-39) now account for over half of the total teaching workforce. However, less than 5% of newly qualified teachers are over the age of 45 (Department for Education, 2019). The next leadership generation will be reaped from today's younger teachers, and, as the millennial generation grows older, that could cause a huge bulge at the top of the career ladder, bottlenecking career aspirations.

This is, of course, unless we can provide a proper incentive for the emergent generation Z to join the profession. However, generation Z value very different employment benefits to older generations, and as the professional landscape

changes, it's critical that schools move with it. In planning this approach, it's vital schools don't also move away from the things that matter to older generations.

It's also clear that there's a greater expectation for generation X and baby boomer teachers to be in management positions than younger millennial and generation Z teachers. We are already amid teacher shortage; without a constant flow of younger teachers, these frontline classroom positions could be under threat. This showcases the need for generation-specific recruitment and retention strategies.

Motivating, retaining and recruiting teachers from four generations

Generally speaking, most sociological institutions recognise four main generations that are evident in the modern workforce. Here are some common descriptions of each; bear in mind that in many ways, these descriptions are highly reductive, but nonetheless can help to explain teachers' career mindset.

We conducted a survey of UK schoolteachers of all ages and from around the country to pull together these findings. They are also supported by the findings of peer-reviewed studies into generational differences.

Baby Boomers

1946-1964, 55 to 75 years old

The oldest of the four groups, baby boomers have transitioned into management positions and areas of authority. They have learned from a young age to value career loyalty and have been rewarded for their years of service, having risen to the top of the teacher pay scale.

Because of this, they are also the group most resistant to change.

Motivation

Baby boomers value visibility and recognition (Smith, 2008). They were raised amidst an explosion in population; as such, there were plenty of other children in their cohort to compete with.

Strategy meetings may represent an opportunity to be recognised by school leadership. Making additional responsibilities available from the recruitment stage can help baby boomer colleagues to demonstrate their commitment to the school.

We conducted a survey of UK schoolteacher's attitudes and motivations. Of our baby boomer-aged respondents, 40.9% said they value visibility and recognition at school, while 54.5% are motivated by a sense of loyalty.

Top of their game

Most baby boomers have already advanced through the ranks, so it's unlikely they'll be looking to progress into SMT. Instead, potential applicants are more likely to be returning after early retirement or might be looking for new employment for other reasons, rather than looking for their next big career move. So-called "empty nesters" may also be returning from retirement now that their families have grown up and moved out.

Flexible working

You might assume that only their younger colleagues are interested in flexible working, but many baby boomers are now seeking it to help them transition into retirement and even care for their families. In fact,

22.7% of our baby boomer respondents are part-time teachers – far more than any other age group.

If you can offer a flexible or part-time alternative to full-time hours, you could benefit from the wealth of knowledge that these veteran teachers can bring to your school. Unless they have recently joined the profession, baby boomers can become great mentors for your younger teachers thanks to their experience.

Even more importantly, this can help you to hold on to your valued school leadership rather than losing them to retirement. These teachers can be a rock to your departments and have a deep understanding of school policy and ethos, making them irreplaceable. For more information about flexible working for schools, see our insight paper, *Modern approaches to teacher retention*.

Traditional recruitment methods

While this generation are comfortable using digital recruitment platforms, they are less likely to engage with it – particularly with social media adverts. This is why it's important to use a range of recruitment platforms and agencies.

Generation X

1965-1980, 40 to 54 years old

As many of the benefits of long service that employees used to enjoy have been eroded over time, members of generation X have grown up in a world that offers fewer rewards for long years of service; as such, they don't feel the same need to be loyal to a single employer that their older colleagues do. If another school can offer them a better deal, they're more likely to take it.

Because of this, they may place a high value on leisure and family time, as they know they won't enjoy the same benefits for putting in extra hours at work (Smith, 2008). Instead of investing themselves into a school, they want a school to invest in them.

Motivation

Generation X are motivated by regular constructive feedback. They are particularly interested in opportunities for training and professional development, which proves a school's commitment to their future (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002).

Our survey showed that 60.3% of generation X teachers are motivated specifically by opportunities for progression.

Career opportunity

Members of generation X are looking to transition into management roles and will want to know how your advertised position fits in to the school hierarchy. If there are opportunities for progression, additional responsibilities or TLRs, it's a good idea to discuss these at interview, as it could make the difference for a successful hire.

Schools should also consider how best to retain the staff they already have. If these opportunities are only offered to new hires, your existing generation X staff are more likely to look for progression elsewhere. Where possible, it's a good idea to set out formal expectations for CPD and career progression.

Flexibility

Again, generation X will be interested in flexible working positions, although to a lesser extent than their older and younger colleagues. As the commercial sector finds new and innovative ways to recruit from the dwindling teacher talent pool, it's important to keep up – and flexible working arrangements are no different.



Gen Y (Millennial)

1981-1996, 25 to 39 years old

Having grown up in the modern world, generation Y are excellent multitaskers that know how to use technology to their advantage.

They have been prepared for the future from a young age – for example, with national achievement portfolios and mass university education. Therefore, they are always looking for the next progressive step to take in their careers.

Motivation

Pre-existing studies have generally found that Generation Y are motivated by thoughts of helping others, improving the environment and making the world a better place (Strauss and Howe, 2007). While this may be true, our study found that this is only the case for 31.3% of teachers in the age category.

Instead, many are now at a point where older millennials are looking to transition into middle management and leadership roles and will be looking for opportunities to jumpstart their career; in fact, 40.6% of our Generation Y respondents said they are motivated by opportunities for career progression, and 56.3% are motivated by visibility and the recognition of their peers. This generation is at a turning point where they are starting to become interested in the next step of their careers.

The effect of the mortgage gap

Younger generations are less willing to be motivated by money because of the mortgage gap. As property prices have risen, it has resulted in less and less benefit to higher earnings than previous generations have enjoyed, as house prices have spiralled away from affordability.

This means that school culture is, in many ways, more important to them than a high-value job listing, and it's important that you emphasise why your school is such a good place to work. This means that millennials value a good connection with their line manager and inspirational management, so it's good to introduce them to these people at interview stage.

Emergent families

Millennials are more likely than generation X to seek reduced or flexible hours to work around their growing families; any schools able to offer this will be able to take advantage of a largely untapped pool of talent.

See our recent insight paper, *Modern approaches to teacher retention*, for more information about flexible working in schools.

Constant progression

At this age, workers are looking to gain new skills at every place they work. This is especially true for today's workforce, as jobs become more temporary and transitional. Nowadays, there's a need to gain new skills to stay competitive – in fact, research by Deloitte has found that only 28% of millennials would consider staying in a job for five or more years (2019).

This can lead millennial teachers to become frustrated by the slow pace of advancement in teaching, as there are no shortcuts. Statistics prove that relatively few millennials are in leadership positions when compared to older generations.

You can help to keep them happy and satisfy this need for progression by offering concrete training and learning opportunities. Because of their intense focus on learning and achieving throughout their lives, millennials are likely to appreciate continuous learning opportunities (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). By offering platforms for professional development, you can set out 'micro-opportunities' that keep younger teachers engaged.

Gen Z

1997-2012, under 25 years old

Generation Z are only now beginning to enter the workforce. Interestingly, students are also part of this generation.

They are true technology natives – more so than millennials – having grown up with an advanced version of the World Wide Web at their fingertips. Because of this, they enjoy collaboration and feedback, both of which they have become accustomed to in their personal lives.

They're also socially conscious, having grown up during a time of a dramatic shift in attitudes towards gender and environmentalism. They are hyper-sensitive towards inequality and expect management to both act on this and to communicate transparently and regularly.

Unlike their predecessors, they are more prone towards a stable job and income and less likely to shift between multiple employers – a behaviour driven out of fear of another recession. They're also highly competitive, like their older baby boomer colleagues.

Motivation

Since teaching qualifications can take a long time to acquire, there weren't enough generation Z teachers in our study to obtain a representative sample. However, we can still predict their future motivations based on the findings of other peer-reviewed studies.

They are more likely to expect their employer to provide a formal training map outlining their next career steps but will want study to be self-directed and independent. NQTs will look for schools that offer continuous career progression.

It's crucial to consider what this generation is looking for from their employer as they move into entry-level teaching positions.

Newly qualified teachers

Broadly speaking, most NQTs will be from Gen Z, so it's important to know what's important to them to attract the best of new teaching talent. This is especially true when you consider your recruitment budget!

These people will be looking for schools that implement good behavioural management systems and have a robust support network for NQTs. You might want to consider and update your behaviour policies and use them as a selling feature in your job listings; this can help you to present your school in the best possible light.

Mental health and pastoral care

Longitudinal generational studies have found that anxiety and depression have risen over subsequent generations, even when comparing these generations at the same age (Twenge et al., 2008). Younger generations may need additional support to help them cope with modern teaching demands.



Keeping everybody happy

There are generational differences in the workplace, and they're a great way to help HR teams predict how they might act in different situations. However, there are also some common desires shared by all age groups we surveyed: the desire for recognition and for career progression. Schools that focus on nurturing their staff will always be more successful than those who view them purely as a resource.

Interestingly, many of our respondents across all age groups also left a similar comment, which we did not predict when we built our survey: they are motivated and work hard for their students' sake.

However you apply generational theory to your recruitment and retention strategy, it's important not to lose sight of the one big reason most teachers join the profession: they love to teach. Take into account people's motivations and make your school a nurturing, caring environment where teachers are supported and encouraged to focus on teaching, and you can keep everyone happy.

What motivates you at work?

- ▶ "Seeing children succeed"
- ▶ "The success of my students"
- ▶ "Working with and helping students. Enjoyment of the job. Love of the subject."
- ▶ "Children making progress"
- ▶ "Passion for my subject"
- ▶ "The students"
- ▶ "Making a difference in pupils' lives"
- ▶ "Teaching, helping and supporting our students"
- ▶ "The children"
- ▶ "The enjoyment of students"
- ▶ "Ensuring the children get the best possible education"
- ▶ "Being able to give something back"
- ▶ "Student progress"
- ▶ "Working with the children"
- ▶ "Helping kids achieve their best"
- ▶ "My students going into my subject area"
- ▶ "Helping children"
- ▶ "Pupil impact"
- ▶ "Making a real difference to the lives of those we teach and work with"

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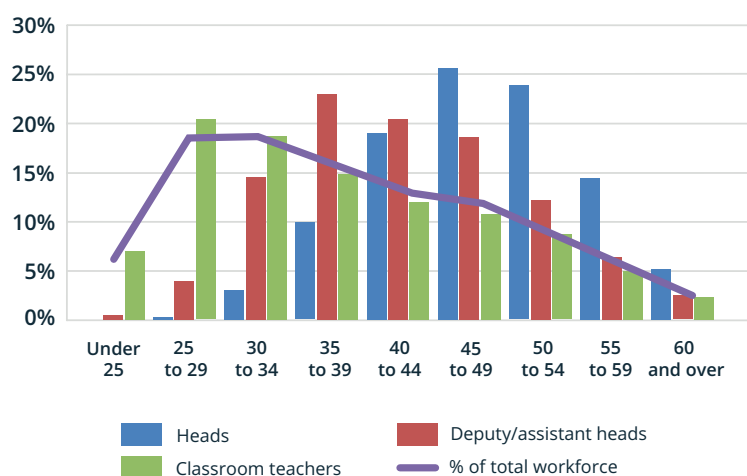
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Addendum



Men and women	Heads	Deputy/assistant heads	Classroom teachers	Total
Under 25	<0.01%	0.03%	7.03%	5.95%
25 to 29	0.26%	3.1%	20.5%	17.68%
30 to 34	2.62%	14.69%	18.75%	17.55%
35 to 39	10.22%	22.34%	14.88%	15.44%
40 to 44	18.71%	20.19%	12.23%	13.39%
45 to 49	25.41%	18.4%	11.04%	12.52%
50 to 54	23.19%	12.32%	8.55%	9.66%
55 to 59	14.35%	6.87%	5.05%	5.69%
60 and over	5.22%	2.07%	1.96%	2.13%

Men and women	Heads	Deputy/assistant heads	Classroom teachers	Total
Gen Z – Under 25	<0.01%	0.03%	7.03%	5.95%
Millennial – 25 to 39	13.1%	40.13%	54.13%	50.67%
Gen X – 40 to 54	67.31%	50.91%	31.82%	35.57%
Baby boomer – 55 to 75	19.57%	8.94%	7.01%	7.82%

The generational breakdown in the teaching workforce

Statistics taken from school workforce census 2018

By numbers

	Heads	Deputy/assistant heads	Classroom teachers	Total
Gen Z – Under 25	1	16	26,967	26,984
Millennial – 25 to 39	2,903	19,225	207,561	229,688
Gen X – 40 to 54	14,903	24,391	121,974	161,264
Baby boomer – 55 to 75	4,331	4,280	26,863	35,474
All ages	22,135	47,911	383,364	453,411

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