

Chapter 3

MAKING TEACHING AN ATTRACTIVE CAREER CHOICE

Summary

The teaching profession needs to be competitive with other occupations in attracting talented and motivated people. This chapter reviews the trends that are raising concerns about teaching's attractiveness as a career choice, reviews the evidence on the main causal factors involved, and develops policy options for countries to consider.

There are two broad concerns about the supply of teachers. One relates to teacher numbers: many countries are either currently experiencing, or will shortly face, a quantitative shortage of teachers. There are particular concerns about teacher shortages in areas such as mathematics, science, ICT and languages. Teacher shortage problems seem to be most acute in schools serving disadvantaged or isolated communities. The other concern is more qualitative, and reflects trends in the composition of the teacher workforce in terms of academic background, gender, knowledge and skills. The ageing of the teaching workforce is compounding recruitment concerns. On average, 26% of primary teachers and 31% of secondary teachers in OECD countries are aged over 50 years, and many will retire in the next few years.

There are a number of countries where teaching is held in high regard as a career, and there are many more qualified applicants than teaching vacancies. The experience of such countries helps counter the view that teaching is a profession in long-term decline. Counter evidence is also supplied by those countries that have experienced an upturn in demand for teaching jobs in recent years.

Policy responses are needed at two levels. The first seeks to improve teaching's general status and competitive position in the job market, and broaden sources of teacher supply to include well-qualified people from other careers and former teachers. The second involves more targeted responses to particular types of teacher shortages, including stronger incentives for teachers with skills that are in short supply, and encouragement and support for teachers to work in challenging schools or difficult locations.

Those countries experiencing teacher over-supply have the opportunity to be much more selective about those who are employed. Initiatives underway include a broadening of teacher selection criteria and well-structured induction and probationary processes to ensure that the best candidates get the available jobs.