



# Retaining teachers with Kent County Council

## *About Kent County Council:*

*With 44,000 staff, Kent County Council is one of England's largest authorities. It has created a dedicated website to provide information about teaching in Kent, including vacancies, job alerts, accommodation and the support and development available: [www.kent-teach.com](http://www.kent-teach.com)*



**To help cut the turnover rate of teachers in its 600 schools, Kent County Council is using an anonymous questionnaire to encourage departing teachers to declare the real reasons why they're leaving their jobs or the profession.**

**TalentDrain developed the confidential online questionnaire which has identified 'poor work-life balance' as a contributing factor. As a result, the council has introduced a new well-being programme for teachers, to help them manage the pressures they face, and it is reviewing training and development opportunities, particularly for newly-qualified teachers.**

When a school loses a teacher, it faces not only disruption to learning and a loss of expertise but also the inconvenience and cost of recruiting a replacement. While a certain level of turnover is inevitable and desirable, managing it depends on understanding exactly why teachers leave their jobs or the profession.

Some schools will instigate a face-to-face exit interview to uncover this information but it is questionable whether teachers in these situations will divulge their real reasons for leaving.

Realising this, Kent County Council has introduced an anonymous questionnaire in order to collect open and honest feedback from departing teachers.

*"We want to ensure that schools have the teachers they need and that Kent is seen as an attractive place for teachers to live and work,"* said Steve Wood, the council's Recruitment and Retention Manager for Schools. *"We've made great strides in teacher recruitment and now our emphasis is on trying to help schools to retain effective teachers."*

Kent employs around 13,000 teachers in 600 primary, secondary and special schools. In line with the national average, the county has a turnover rate of 10 per cent but this includes a significant number of teachers simply moving from one Kent school to another.



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*“The majority of our teachers move on for positive reasons, like a promotion,” said Steve Wood. “But others go because they are not so well motivated and we wanted to better understand why.”*

*“TalentDrain have a lot of expertise and their online tools make it easy to capture exit data. We’ve found them easy to work with and very professional.”*

## Anonymous questionnaire

The council asked TalentDrain to develop a confidential online questionnaire which leaving teachers could complete anonymously in less than 15 minutes.

*“We wanted something quick and easy that would give people an opportunity to tell us about their working lives and highlight particular issues, if that’s what they wanted to do,” said Steve Wood. “TalentDrain have a lot of expertise and their online tools make it easy to capture exit data. We’ve found them easy to work with and very professional.”*

TalentDrain tailored one of its generic exit questionnaires, called Reflections, so that it fitted the teaching environment and the structure of schools in Kent.

*“They advised and supported us on the types of questions we should ask and how we should phrase them,” said Steve Wood. “They also ‘host’ the site where teachers access and complete the questionnaire, so there was no impact on our server or network.”*

The resultant questionnaire was piloted in one of Kent’s 23 clusters of schools. Encouraged by the high response rate, the council soon extended use of the questionnaire to all schools in the county.

*“We’ve prepared letters which schools now give to departing teachers, inviting them to go online and complete the questionnaire,” said Steve Wood. “We’re also offering a paper-based version of the questionnaire for those who don’t have Internet access. We hope this will encourage an even greater response.”*

## Findings

TalentDrain analyse the findings from the questionnaire and provide detailed reports to Kent County Council.

As well as expected complaints - such as the workload, the long hours and bureaucracy - the questionnaire has highlighted some interesting issues around communication within schools and also the high level of satisfaction teachers gain from working with children.



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*“The real interest for us is the number of ways in which we can split the data and make comparisons such as newly-qualified teachers against experienced teachers, males against females and primary school responses against secondary schools,”* said Steve Wood. *“This has raised some very interesting differences.”*

### Well-being programme

As a result of the exit data, the council has introduced a new well-being programme for teachers, which aims to help individuals and groups of staff to successfully manage the pressures they face. It is also reviewing the available training and professional development opportunities, particularly for newly-qualified teachers.

*“Poor work-life balance, created by the workload, was one of the main causes of concern for teachers,”* said Steve Wood. *“To address this, we’ve created a well-being programme to help teachers make a sustainable improvement to their physical and psychological health. We’ll continue to run the questionnaire and we’ll use the exit data to inform our teacher-retention strategy and to develop further training opportunities.”*

The county council also plans to survey all newly-qualified teachers at the end of their first year, not just those who leave.

*“Newly-qualified teachers are our future,”* said Steve Wood. *“It is very important that we know what they are thinking, so we can keep them in the profession. But we’re interested in the welfare of all of our teachers. Understanding why people leave enables us to put initiatives in place that will prevent teacher burn-out and retain these important skills in our schools.”*

**For more information, please call TalentDrain on 0870 760 6598 or e-mail [info@talentdrain.com](mailto:info@talentdrain.com). [www.talentdrain.com](http://www.talentdrain.com)**