A photograph of a classroom scene. In the foreground, the backs of two children are visible. The child on the left is a boy with short brown hair, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt, with his right arm raised high. The child on the right is a girl with blonde hair tied in a ponytail, wearing a dark blue school uniform and a red headband with black polka dots, also with her right arm raised. In the background, a green chalkboard is visible with some faint white markings. The overall scene is brightly lit, suggesting a classroom environment.

The Management of Substitution Cover for Teachers: Follow-up Report



Northern Ireland Audit Office

Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General for Northern Ireland

Ordered by the Northern Ireland Assembly to be printed and published under the authority of the Assembly, in accordance with its resolution of 27 November 2007

The Management of Substitution Cover for Teachers: Follow-up Report

This report has been prepared under Article 8 of the Audit (Northern Ireland Order 1987 for presentation to the Northern Ireland Assembly in accordance with Article 11 of that Order.

K J Donnelly
Comptroller and Auditor General

Northern Ireland Audit Office
26 May 2010

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Abbreviations

CCEA	Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
ESA	Education and Skills Authority
GTCNI	General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland
LMS	Local Management of Schools
NICIE	Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education
NISTR	Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers' Register
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
TNC	Teachers Negotiating Committee

Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Introduction

1. When a teacher is absent from the classroom, schools regularly use temporary employment contracts, full-time and part-time, to help them deal with such occurrences. This is known as substitution cover and is a normal and unavoidable part of school management. In 2003, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) at Westminster¹ concluded that in Northern Ireland there was:
 - ineffective management of teachers' sickness absence;
 - inadequate control over the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers; and
 - a lack of review of substitute teaching.
2. Since the publication of the PAC report, there have been significant developments in the strategic context of education. With the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA)² and the implementation of *Every School a Good School*, schools are being asked to demonstrate greater accountability and delivery. Within this context, the level of teacher absence will be a key indicator for the Department of Education (the Department) as it seeks to drive up standards. Research from the United States shows that teachers are the most important factor determining student achievement³, and there is recent evidence to demonstrate that teacher absences significantly reduce pupil achievement⁴.
3. Against this background, we found that, while the Department and teacher employing authorities (the Education and Library Boards (Boards) and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS)) have made considerable progress in taking forward the recommendations of PAC, the management of teacher absence and substitution cover is an area where there continues to be scope for improvement and savings to be achieved.
4. In responding to the PAC report in 2003⁵ the Department acknowledged that there were weaknesses in the operation of the information system on substitution cover and sickness absence and said it planned to implement a new computer system by 2005 which would give improved management information. The Department also told the Committee that it would develop an action plan to ensure that all stakeholders had access to the information necessary for efficient management of teacher absence and substitution cover. It is disappointing that it has taken six years since the PAC report to implement the system and that due to software problems a sound data system to assist the Department, employing authorities and schools in managing teacher attendance has still to be properly established. This continues to prevent effective insight into substitution cover and sickness absence.

1 *The management of substitution cover for teachers*, Committee of Public Accounts, 27th Report, Session 2002-03, HC 473

2 The Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will replace the five Education and Library Boards and the functions currently performed by the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Youth Council. It will also take on the front-line support and related functions currently undertaken by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG). Some of the functions currently performed by the Staff Commission for the Education and Library Boards will be absorbed into the Authority while others will no longer be required. Some functions from within the Department of Education will also transfer to ESA.

3 *Teachers, Schools and Academic Achievement*, S.Rivkin, E.Hanushek and J.Kain, *Econometrica*, 73 (2): 417-58

4 The impact of individual teachers on student achievement, J.Rockoff, *American Economic Review*, 94 (2): 247-52

5 Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel Memorandum on the 27th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, Session 2002-03, London: the Stationery Office, CM 5953

The costs of substitution cover for teachers

5. The legal requirement for timetabled classes to be supervised means that when substitution cover is needed, it has an immediate and direct financial consequence. Expenditure on substitute teachers has increased in real terms by 41 per cent since 2000-01 – from £46.9 million (at 2008-09 prices) to over £66million in 2008-09 (paragraph 2.1). Against this background, increasing use of substitute cover can also pose a challenge to the efficient delivery of teaching.
6. The Department makes teacher absence data available to the employing authorities and it told us that it is currently working closely with consultants in specifying, designing and writing reports for the new payroll and personnel system using a new reporting tool. It is essential in this process that any under-reporting of sickness absence is rectified so that the scope for improved service delivery and savings is fully understood. We recommend that, in further developing this system, there is a need to build up a profile of teacher absence across schools which will allow managers to identify patterns of absences and help them to understand and respond to the range of factors which influence, and are influenced by, teacher absence.
7. Substitution cover costs vary considerably across schools. This suggests that there is a need on the part of the Department and employing authorities to ensure that they continue to demonstrate a clear commitment to engaging regularly with each other and schools if further progress is to be

made in narrowing the range of costs. The Department told us that an expected benefit of the creation of ESA will be the impetus for evening out regional variations in substitution costs and allowing a more consistent influence to be brought to bear on school governors and school leaders.

Teachers and sickness absence

8. Average sickness levels for teachers in Northern Ireland stood at 10.1 days per annum in 2000-01⁶. By 2004-05 sickness levels had fallen to a low of 7.52 days, however they crept back up to 9.52 days in 2005-06. Since then the level has reduced gradually and currently stands at 7.81 days. While we acknowledge the decrease since 2000-01, following the PAC report (see footnote 1) the Department set a target that it would aim to bring sickness absence levels into line with those in England. In 2001, sickness absence in England was 5.47 days per teacher. This figure remained at this level in subsequent years and dropped to 5.0 days in 2008.
9. Employing authorities and school sectors vary considerably in their teacher sickness absence rates. For instance, sick absences in controlled schools are 7.1 days, compared with 8.5 days in the maintained sector; teachers in special schools have a particularly high level of absence – 9.7 days, which according to the Department reflects the challenging nature of teaching in a difficult setting; and the Southern Board currently has a higher absence rate than the other Boards. These variations suggest that there are opportunities

⁶ The management of substitution cover for teachers, NIAO, NIA 53/02, December 2002

⁷ Our report in 2002 records sickness absence in England as 6 days in 2000. This was a rounding figure based on a provisional figure at that time.

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for reductions in sickness absence if appropriate steps are taken to improve management, oversight and expectations of teacher attendance.

10. With absence levels in Northern Ireland schools continuing to compare unfavourably with their English counterparts, the Department told us that it believes a reduction to English levels remains “extremely challenging”. It also told us that, in its view, the creation of the new ESA, along with ensuring that all schools work within the policy framework of *Every School a Good School* and take steps to strengthen school governance, industrial relations and staff support, should yield further improvements in the levels of sickness absence among teachers.
 11. Following the PAC report in 2003 (see footnote 1), the Department set the target suggested by the Committee - that the Boards and CCMS should reduce teacher absence to the levels in English schools by 2008 (6 days as reported at that time). This target was not achieved. The Department then initially decided not to set a further specific target, but during the course of our report, it re-established a target – a reduction to an average 6 days a year by 2010-2011.
 12. The importance of setting challenging targets was stressed by PAC in 2008 in its report on managing sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (see footnote 14), with particular emphasis on the use of individual departmental targets. It also advocated the use of detailed action plans so that targets would be achieved.
- We recommend that the Department takes account of the Committee’s proposals and seeks to ensure that such an approach is tailored to the management of teacher sickness absence within individual schools.
13. A feature of the remodelling process of the school workforce in England was to introduce limits on the amount of cover for absent colleagues that teachers and head teachers could provide while at the same time making new arrangements for deploying support staff. Employers and teachers’ trades unions in Northern Ireland did not agree that support staff should be professionalised to undertake teaching-type duties; therefore, the only way to reduce teacher cover for absent colleagues is to employ substitute teachers. Given the funding constraints the Department has identified in pursuing a similar course in Northern Ireland, it will be important that it is able to demonstrate that actions to prevent or reduce teacher sickness absence can at least pay for themselves without creating a financial burden for the taxpayer.
 14. We acknowledge the progress that has been made in reducing teacher sickness absence to the current average of 7.81 days. In order to sustain and improve on this performance, efforts to support attendance will be as important as those for deterring absence. The particular combination of approaches that will work best in any school or sector will, to some extent, depend upon an analysis of their sickness absence problem. It is important that the Department and employing authorities develop reporting structures that allow an analysis of the causes of
-

teacher sickness absence so that specific interventions can be put in place. In the Department's view, the establishment of ESA and a more extensive use of C2K by schools should provide a more streamlined and consistent administrative context within which to develop and continuously improve effective management information and reporting systems.

15. A clear policy statement on absence management is the first step in improving the management of attendance, and obtaining the support of governors and teachers in its implementation is critical to its success. We have highlighted to employing authorities the need to address an apparent cultural resistance to implementing a teacher attendance policy within some areas of the school system. We have also recommended that the Department strongly encourages principals and governing bodies to show leadership by attending relevant training sessions on the application of attendance policies.

The re-employment of prematurely retired teachers

16. A long-running feature of teacher substitution cover has been the re-employment of teachers who have retired early. PAC sessions at Westminster in 1993 and 2003 recommended that stricter controls should be exercised over the re-employment of those teachers who had benefited from premature retirement terms. However, we have found that attempts to curb the use of prematurely retired teachers for substitution cover have met with little success. We acknowledge
- that prematurely retired teachers account for only 13 per cent of substitution days worked. However, while there has been a fall in the number of prematurely retired teachers being re-employed, the 62,310 substitution days worked in 2008-09 was an increase of 40 per cent compared with 2000-01 and 81 per cent compared with 1996-97. This is also reflected in the fact that, of all substitution cover days, the proportion worked by prematurely retired teachers has remained around the same level since 2000-01.
17. At 31 March 2008, almost 50 per cent of teachers on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers' Register (NISTR) were 50 years of age or more, with over a third aged between 50 and 59. Only a quarter of those on the Register were under 30 years of age. Twenty-seven per cent of the 20,000 teachers currently employed in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland are over the age of 50. On the basis of these statistics, we consider that a reduction in the proportion of substitution cover days worked by prematurely retired teachers currently on the NISTR may take a significant period of time to be realised.
18. As the current arrangements do not encourage employers to behave prudently, the Department is bringing forward legislation which will make employing authorities liable for the full cost of teachers' premature retirement compensation from 2010. The Department anticipates that this will limit the granting of premature retirement benefits to a more sustainable level in future, the practice of awarding enhancements having already effectively

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ceased when employers became liable for the costs in 2008. The minimum pension age increased from 50 to 55 with effect from 6 April 2010. This is a matter of tax legislation and is contained in the 2004 Finance Act. (Therefore, teachers aged 50-54 will no longer be eligible to be granted premature retirement). As the pool of prematurely retired teachers reduces there will be an associated decrease in the extent of substitution cover provided by such teachers. The expectation is that this will ensure more newly qualified teachers get a greater opportunity to fill temporary vacancies and provide substitution cover.

19. The Department is considering what further measures may be taken in respect of future premature retirements. It is likely that employing authorities will make increasing use of severance provision (planned for 2010 under proposed new regulations) to secure the early release of teachers, rather than the more expensive premature retirement terms which involve the early release of unreduced pension benefits. The re-employment of teachers who have been made redundant also cannot be prohibited as there would be a risk that the Department could be subject to Tribunal claims by teachers prevented from applying for certain jobs. They would have to receive some form of compensation beyond the statutory minimum, with re-employment conditions attached.
20. The ability of newly qualified teachers to get teaching experience by providing substitution cover for permanent teachers, has been significantly constrained by the willingness of schools to re-employ

prematurely retired teachers. Falling school enrolments are also a factor in the availability of employment opportunities. The Department has taken action to reduce the numbers entering teacher training since 2004 by 27 per cent, however, it takes some years for this to impact on the overall number of newly qualified and recently qualified teachers seeking employment. It continues to be important that teacher workforce planning at a strategic level can ensure that the numbers of newly qualified teachers coming through the training system is in line with the numbers needed to fill vacancies and provide substitute cover given the numbers of re-employed teachers who continue to provide temporary cover in schools.

Part One:
Introduction



Part One: Introduction

1.1 Whatever measures schools take, it is inevitable that there will be times when they will need to use substitution cover for the absence of teachers. There is no easy solution to the problem of substitution cover costs, but effective action can reduce negative impacts. Following a report by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO),⁸ in 2003 the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) at Westminster⁹ concluded, among other things, that in Northern Ireland there was:

- ineffective management of teachers' sickness absence;
- inadequate control over the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers; and
- a lack of review of substitute teaching.

1.2 In addressing these issues, it is important that the Department of Education (the Department), employing authorities, school leaders and school Boards of Governors work in close partnership. This report examines the extent to which progress has been made in implementing the PAC recommendations to improve the management of teacher substitution in Northern Ireland. Appendix 1 provides a summary of progress against PAC's recommendations.

Background

1.3 Teachers employed to provide substitution cover in schools can have contracts ranging from the occasional day in

order to provide short notice cover, to longer periods covering, for example, maternity absences. (Figure 3 provides more detail on the various reasons for teacher substitution cover.) A whole range of teachers are employed to provide substitution cover, for example:

- newly qualified or young mobile teachers who are not yet in full-time employment;
- teachers with young families who are returning to teaching after a career break; and
- teachers who have taken early retirement and usually only wish to find occasional work.

1.4 In 2006, the Department advised schools that only teachers registered on the Northern Ireland Substitute Teacher Register (NISTR) should be employed as substitute teachers from 1 September 2006. Currently, there are around 7,300 teachers on the register. NISTR checks that teachers are registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI)¹⁰ (and checks periodically that they continue to be registered), in order to maintain their details on the 'live register', which is made available to schools seeking substitute teachers.

1.5 Under Local Management of Schools (LMS) arrangements, the financial consequences of a teacher's absence from work can fall on either the school's delegated budget or on the non-delegated funds held centrally

8 The management of substitution cover for teachers, NIAO, NIA 53/02, December 2002

9 *The management of substitution cover for teachers*, Committee of Public Accounts, 27th Report, Session 2002-03, HC 473

10 In accordance with the Education (NI) Order 1998 persons employed as teachers in grant-aided schools and as peripatetic teachers are required to register with GTCNI. GTCNI is a self-regulatory professional body for teachers which has a statutory duty to determine who should be a member of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland. As part of its registration process, GTCNI will approve qualifications, for the purpose of registration and eligibility to teach.

by the relevant Board (or the Department in the case of Grant-Maintained Integrated schools) (see Appendix 2).¹¹ For example, in schools with more than four full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers, where a permanent member of staff is absent for a period in excess of 20 working days, substitution costs from the 21st day of illness are charged to central funds. For schools with four FTE teachers or fewer, this will be from the 11th day of absence. Where teacher substitution costs are paid from centre funds, this is limited to a maximum of point 4 on the teachers' main salary scale and any substitution costs in excess of this are charged to the school's delegated budget. Where a permanent teacher has been absent for 20 days or more, he/she has to give the Principal one week's notice of intention to return to work so that arrangements for cover can be discontinued.

11 This report excluded the 54 voluntary grammar schools which exist within the Northern Ireland school system. Each of these schools has its own payroll system. Given the difficulties associated with collecting data from a large number of independent systems, our review excluded these schools.

Part Two:

While substitute teachers are needed to maintain the smooth running of schools, costs have risen dramatically



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While substitute teachers are needed to maintain the smooth running of schools, costs have risen dramatically

The cost of substitution cover has increased significantly since PAC reported in 2003

2.1 In its 2003 report, PAC noted that substitution cover for teacher absences in Northern Ireland cost £38 million in 2000-01. The cost of substitution cover can be problematical for the budgets of schools and employing authorities, given that such expenditure is unpredictable and difficult to control. Despite the Department's

efforts in trying to contain these costs, Figure 1 shows they currently stand at over £66 million – taking account of inflation, an increase of 41 per cent over the period. (Appendices 3 and 4 provide a breakdown of substitution cover costs by school sector and Phase for each of the years since the PAC report.) Figure 1 also shows that substitution cover costs currently comprise around 11 per cent of total salary costs.

Figure 1: Teacher Substitution Costs by Board or Sector, 2008-09

Board/Sector	Substitution Costs £m	Total Salary Costs £m	Substitution costs as proportion of salary costs %
Belfast Area Controlled	5.6	41.2	13.6
Belfast Area Maintained	5.2	46.6	11.2
Belfast Total	10.8	87.8	12.3
North Eastern Area Controlled	10.1	84.2	12.0
North Eastern Area Maintained	4.2	35.7	11.8
North Eastern Total	14.3	119.9	11.9
South Eastern Area Controlled	8.6	73.4	11.7
South Eastern Area Maintained	3.7	29.7	12.5
South Eastern Total	12.3	103.1	11.9
Southern Area Controlled	6.3	59.1	10.7
Southern Area Maintained	8.3	68.1	12.2
Southern Total	14.6	127.2	11.5
Western Area Controlled	4.3	38.0	11.3
Western Area Maintained	6.9	60.2	11.5
Western Total	11.2	98.2	11.4
GMI	2.8	31.7	8.8
Total	66.0	567.9	11.6

Source: Department
* Salary costs for Special schools are included in totals for Boards

Figure 2: Proportion of substitute teaching days, 2000-01 to 2008-09

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Total teaching days	3,154,320	3,158,025	3,142,620	3,145,935	3,124,290	3,254,355	3,195,075	3,214,965	3,235,440
Substitution days	338,330	384,965	388,526	394,450	401,561	397,939	407,327	438,114	470,860
% substitution days	10.70	12.19	12.36	12.54	12.85	12.23	12.75	13.63	14.55

Source: Department

2.2 The increased cost of substitution cover is reflected also in the incidence of substitution as a proportion of available teaching days. This has increased from 10.7 per cent in 2000-01 to 14.55 per cent in 2008-09 (see Figure 2).

The management information on substitution cover costs remains limited

2.3 Figure 3 shows that the breakdown of substitution cover costs replicates the format which was available at the time of our

Figure 3: Breakdown of substitution cover costs by category

Reason	2000-01* £	2008-09 £	% change*
Vacant posts	11,451,500	23,304,120	+104.0
Sickness	10,687,900	11,309,694	+5.8
Training/curriculum	3,751,900	2,698,916	-28.1
Maternity/adoption	3,967,000	13,087,730	+230.0
Personal business	677,400	668,994	-1.2
Educational visits	454,300	799,524	+76.0
Relief for teaching principal	162,800	179,743	+10.4
Union business	100,100	38,335	-61.7
Other**	3,335,600	13,988,433	+319.4
Total	34,318,500	66,075,489	+92.5

Source: Department

Notes: * 2000-01 cost data relates only to "daily" substitution cover. At that time, cost data on "hourly" substitution cover was not available. Figures for 2008-09 include both types of cover. (Daily substitution cover accounts for 90 per cent of all costs.) The % change figures will therefore be overstated.

** For example, public service absence (see Appendix 2)

Part Two:

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report in 2002. While the level of detail is quite limited, it indicates a number of areas where there has been a significant increase in costs, particularly, "vacant posts", "maternity/adoption" and "other". In terms of vacancies, which account for a third of total substitution costs, the rise might reflect an increase in vacancies of a temporary nature and/or a tendency by schools to recruit on a temporary basis. However, the category of "vacant posts" is also used by the Department, to an unknown extent, as a default when schools fail to provide it with a reason for the absence of a permanent teacher, so will be overstated. Reasons for the substantial increase in the "other" category, which account for over 20 per cent of total substitution costs, are also difficult to determine without a breakdown of the figure. In terms of "maternity/adoption", the Department told us that, in addition to an increase in the numbers taking maternity leave in recent years, there had been an increase in the average length of time taken because of an increase in the number of weeks during which statutory maternity pay is payable (i.e. from 26 weeks to 39 weeks). The Department also told us that the introduction in recent years of extended leave of absence for paternity and adoption will also have had some impact on the use of substitute cover.

2.4 In responding to the PAC report in 2003¹², the Department acknowledged that there were weaknesses in the operation of the information system on substitution cover and sickness absence and said it planned to implement a new computer system (to be known as the Teachers' Payroll Replacement Project) by 2005 which would

give improved management information. The new payroll replacement computer system, *Resourcelink*, is now in place with the Permanent Teachers payroll going live in April 2009 and the Temporary Teachers going live in November 2009. The Department told us that the payroll system will remain the primary tool for providing the data necessary to monitor teacher absence. However C2K¹³ would, when fully embedded and utilised in schools, allow for a more sensitive analysis of the full range of employment data.

2.5 The Department provides an annual breakdown of sickness absence information to each employing authority using a "traffic lights" system, with six-monthly updates available on request. Schools with low absence levels are shown in green, those with mid-range absences are shown in amber and schools with high absence levels are shown in red. The previous year's data is also shown for comparison. This information is subsequently discussed at regular Accountability Reviews with employing authorities. They are asked to investigate "red" schools to ascertain the reasons for high absence levels and to ensure that appropriate management interventions are made by the Principal and/or the Board of Governors.

2.6 All employing authorities told us that, as in 2002, they still had concerns about the amount and quality of data they are able to access. They also suggested that the information received from the Department was not sufficiently timely to enable effective management action to be taken. The Department acknowledged that, prior to

12 See footnote 5

13 The C2K project is a government initiative designed to provide communication and information technology within a managed learning environment for all schools in Northern Ireland. It will provide the content necessary to support, the curriculum, professional development and school administration and management.

the introduction of *Resourcelink*, there were some limitations in some of the reports the system produced but considered that they would still have allowed “real time” reporting. It stated, also, that it was the responsibility of employing authorities to ensure that they received information from schools at such intervals as they required (for example, monthly, termly etc), through C2K or by means of paper records, to manage sickness absence.

2.7 The Department told us that, using a new reporting tool (Cognos), it has developed a range of absence reports for each of the Boards, including for example:

- absences related to stress;
- absences of more than 6 casual days in a 12 month rolling period; and
- continuous absences of 4 weeks or more.

However, currently there is a conflict between the software versions of the reporting tool used by the Department and the employing authorities which means that the employing authorities are unable to run reports, although they retain enquiry access to individual teacher’s sickness records. Moreover, CCMS still does not have access to *Resourcelink* and, therefore, any of these reports. The Department told us that it was hoped CCMS would gain access when the ESA network is established.

2.8 We acknowledge the establishment of *Resourcelink* and the Department’s assurances that, through this, steps will

be taken to address the issue of teacher absence with the utmost urgency. However, it is disappointing that it has taken six years since the PAC report to implement the system and that due to software problems, a sound data system to assist the Department, employing authorities and schools in managing teacher attendance has still to be properly established.

2.9 In order to ensure the efficient management of substitution cover, it is crucial that good quality management information is available so that the Department, employing authorities and schools can develop an effective insight into, and understanding of, the costs, patterns and levels of substitution cover. In particular, given the proportion of substitution costs which the “vacancy” and “other” categories account for, it is imperative that the ambiguity surrounding their composition is rectified and that a robust mechanism is put in place to validate the completeness and accuracy of reported absences. The Department told us that the establishment of ESA should result in a more consistent and common approach to the wide and disparate use of reasons for substitution currently used by employing authorities.

2.10 We acknowledge the actions which the Department and the employing authorities have taken in response to the recommendations of the PAC. However, it remains important to recognise that the range of potentially useful management tools suggested can only be effective as part of a much wider strategy of identifying the actual causes of absence and targeting these appropriately to prevent staff becoming ill

Part Two:

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in the first place. In 2008¹⁴, PAC reinforced the best practice principle that, in managing sickness absence, good management information is vital in providing an improved understanding of absence problems. This echoes guidance produced previously by the Cabinet Office in 1998¹⁵ which calls for the recording of specific core data in all instances of employee sickness absence. Efficient data collection and monitoring will be paramount if the nature of sickness absence among teachers is to be properly understood.

2.11 In order to manage unscheduled teacher absence, an effective profile of school-level absences needs to be built up. This would involve being able to compare absence data - by days of the week, reason, dates of absence and cost - against factors such as employee age and gender, length of service and school location. It would be important, too, that the dataset would allow the relationships between teacher absence and enrolment, pupil attendance, pupil socio-economic status and pupil achievement to be explored.

2.12 According to the Department, a lack of consistency in the definition and recording of teacher absences remains due to the wide range of absence coding specifications used by the various employing authorities. This makes meaningful substitution figures very difficult to collate. However, the Department considers that the establishment of ESA should provide the basis for ensuring that a common approach to the recording of absence across all schools is put in place. In our view, the collection and dissemination of absence data could be structured under the headings in Box 1, as a minimum.

2.13 Echoing a similar finding in our report on staff absence across the Northern Ireland Civil Service¹⁶, information such as that detailed in Box 1 should be shared regularly with senior managers in schools and Boards of Governors. In our view, it would be useful also if ESA, when it is established, were to publish an annual profile of teacher absence across the region covering elements such as those suggested in Box 1.

Box 1

Absence - dates, days of the week, reasons, number and duration

Teacher - scale point, gender, age and length of service

School - employing authority, school sector, school size and free school meal entitlement

Employment status - permanent/temporary, full/part-time

Leave type - sick (using NICS categories of illness), personal, bereavement, etc

Cost - total substitution cost, substitution cost by category, average cost per substitute, total sick pay bill and average sick pay per teacher

14 Managing sickness absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Public Accounts Committee, 4 September 2008, 38/07/08R

15 Working well together - managing sickness absence in the public sector, Cabinet Office, 1998

16 Management of Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, NIAO, NIA 132/07-08, May 2008.

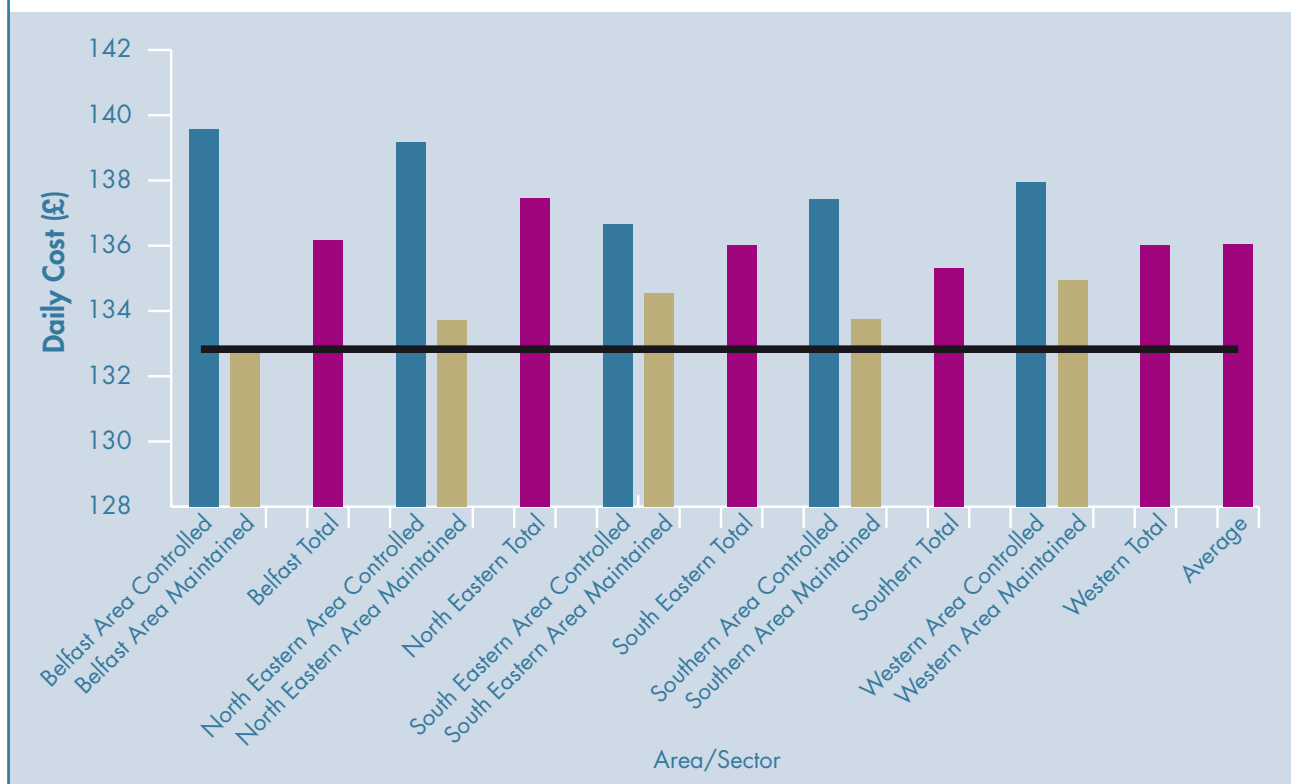
There is substantial variation in the average rates being paid for substitution cover by schools in the different Education and Library Board areas.

2.14 Following the PAC report in 2003, the Department imposed a maximum level on the compensation available to schools where the cost of employing a substitute teacher is met from central budgets¹⁷ (see Appendix 2). This was intended to provide an incentive for schools to employ lower-cost newly qualified teachers as substitutes. From 1 September 2008 to 31 August 2009,

the maximum level equates to a daily rate of £132.81 (equivalent to point M4 on the teacher salary scale).

2.15 Figure 4 shows that there is a 5.1 per cent difference between the lowest average daily rate of £132.75, paid by schools in the maintained sector in the Belfast Board area, and the highest average daily rate of £139.58, paid by controlled schools in the Belfast Board. In addition, the average rates paid by schools in all five Board areas are above the maximum compensation rate paid to schools from centre funds.

Figure 4: Daily substitution cover rates paid by schools by employing authority 2008-09



Source: Department

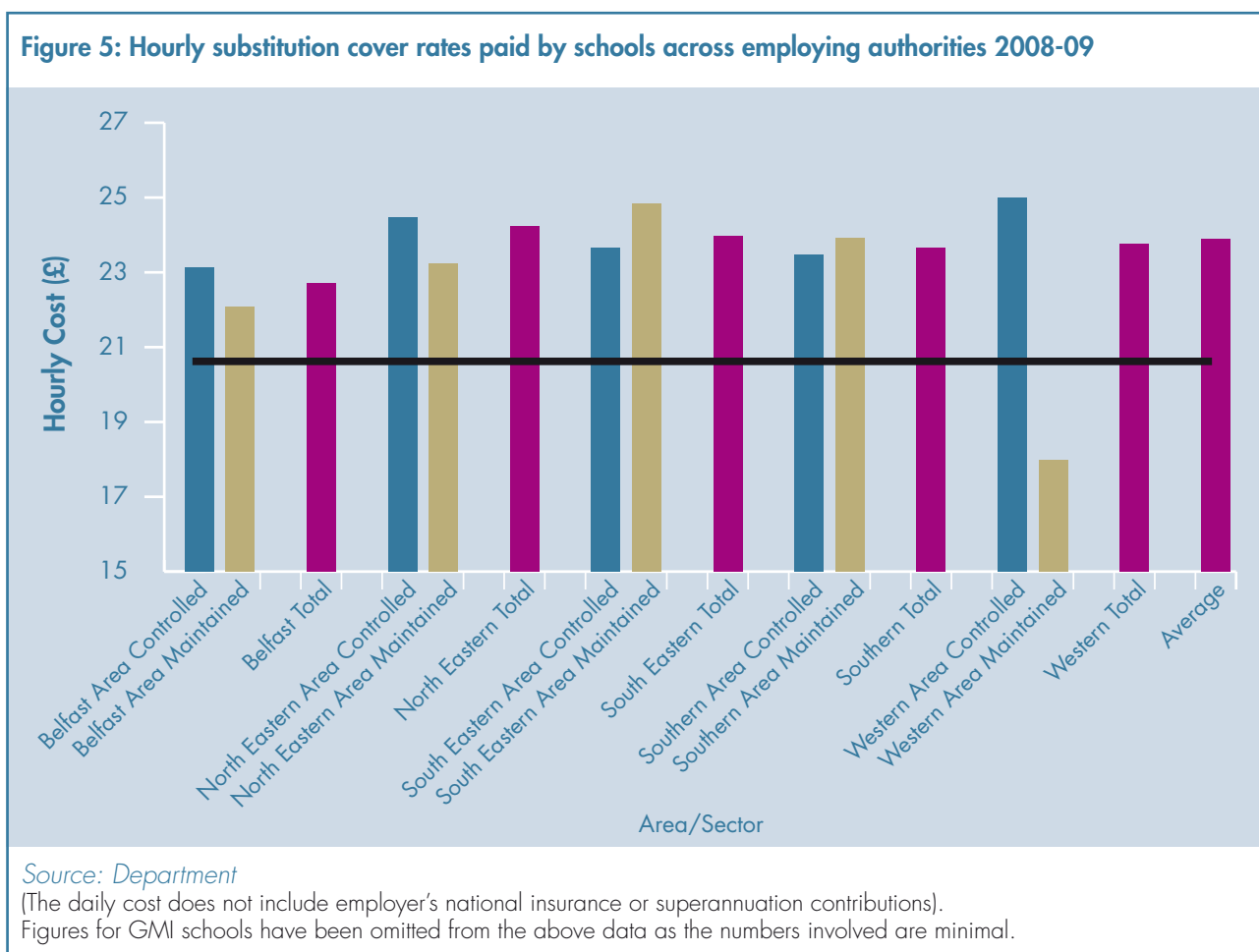
(The daily cost does not include employer's national insurance or superannuation contributions).

Figures for GMI Schools have been omitted from the above data as the numbers involved are minimal

17 The Common Funding Scheme states that the only exception to this capping is where the substitute teacher has been employed as cover for a teacher who is an accredited representative and is engaged on trade union business. We acknowledge that Boards may approve the payment of substitution rates above Point M4 for trade union cover and the Department told us that in its view the expenditure on substitution cover for trade union business shown in Figure 3 is clearly understated.

Part Two:

While substitute teachers are needed to maintain the smooth running of schools, costs have risen dramatically



2.16 The figures above show a substantial variation between the average cost incurred for a day's substitution cover by controlled schools and by maintained schools. The average cost incurred by controlled schools (£138.14) is over 3 per cent above that incurred by maintained schools (£133.95).

2.17 The variations between the rates paid for hourly cover are even greater (see Figure 5). The difference between the lowest average hourly rate, paid by maintained schools in the Western Board (£17.99),

and the highest average hourly rate, paid by controlled schools in the Western Board (£24.99), is over 38 per cent. The maximum rate for compensation from central funding for hourly substitution cover was £20.47 during the 2008-09 academic year.

2.18 If all schools matched the lowest average costs incurred - £132.75 per day by maintained schools in the Belfast Board and £17.99 per hour by maintained schools in the Western Board - this would release potential efficiency savings of

almost £2.5 million per annum. We acknowledge the Department's view that the scope for savings in the use of substitution cover cannot be characterised in such simplistic terms. For instance, one of the big stumbling blocks faced by schools attempting to access substitution cover is often the reluctance of many of those teachers on the register to travel longer distances to work. In these circumstances, schools can often be left with little alternative but to employ older, more expensive retired teachers who may have close links with a particular school. We do, however, note that the highest average daily costs are incurred in the geographically small Belfast area. However, while we recognise that the choices available in employing substitution cover may often be limited, schools need to continue to pay careful attention to the costs of substitution cover to ensure that resources committed in this way are spent in the most cost-effective way.

2.19 Against a background of wide variations in teacher substitution costs, it is vital that employing authorities continue to demonstrate a commitment to the effective management of the impact of teacher substitution cover - reviewing the costs of employing substitute teachers and ensuring that these costs are reasonable, both at a school level and at an overall level. It is important, too, that the Department sustains its engagement with employing authorities on this issue, to ensure that its expectations with regard to the value for money of substitution cover are met. The Department told us that an expected benefit of the creation of ESA

will be the impetus for reducing regional variations in substitution costs and allowing a more consistent influence to be brought to bear on school governors and school leaders.

Establishment of the NISTR has been a success but there have been teething problems

- 2.20 The NISTR was established by the Department in 2006, in partnership with the employing authorities, to provide a regional database of qualified teachers who can provide substitute cover for schools throughout Northern Ireland. The system provides a central real-time substitute booking system which operates on a geographical basis to serve the whole of the region.
- 2.21 One of the proposed main benefits of a centralised system is to avoid duplication of effort among both employers and substitute teachers in the range of recruitment, application and selection procedures that have to be undertaken. The system also performs enhanced disclosure checks on the references, qualifications and criminal records of each registered teacher. This removes the need for schools to complete such checks, and reduces the administrative burden on the Department.
- 2.22 At 31 March 2009, there were 7,306 teachers on the register. Figure 6 provides a breakdown of the composition of the register and the extent to which those registered have been employed to provide

Part Two:

While substitute teachers are needed to maintain the smooth running of schools, costs have risen dramatically

Figure 6: Teachers registered and employed through NISTR, April – September 2009

Teachers	Number registered to provide cover	Number employed to provide cover
Qualified/Newly qualified	4,974	3,023
Age-retired	433	231
Premature-retired:		
Redundancy	1,779	1,169
Efficient discharge	74	33
Ill health	7*	-
Actuarially reduced benefits	39	24
TOTAL	7,306	4,480

Source: Department

* The Department told us that a prospective employer would need to be satisfied that these seven teachers meet the health requirement for teaching before offering them employment as a teacher. If such teachers are re-employed, their pension would be suspended until normal retirement age and any enhancement removed.

substitution cover. Figures available for June 2009 show that schools have booked 96 per cent of their substitution cover days and 85 per cent of substitution cover hours through NISTR. The remaining substitution cover days or hours were booked directly by schools from their own contacts.

2.23 We consider that the Department could have established the NISTR in a timelier manner. Having advised schools that, from 1 September 2006, only those teachers registered with NISTR should be employed in schools, it continued to accept manual requests for the payment of substitutes who were not employed via NISTR. The Department told us that there were some difficulties prior to the implementation date, including a poor school uptake of NISTR training, while some schools, particularly nurseries, did not have access to the register. It was not until May 2008 that

the Department informed schools that the use of NISTR would be mandatory from 1 August 2008.

2.24 The Department now issues a memorandum to all employing authorities and schools on a monthly basis outlining its requirements for the receipt of information from them, and including a reminder about the mandatory use of the NISTR to source teachers for substitution cover. A NISTR working group communicates the requirements of NISTR to all teacher training colleges in Northern Ireland via seminars, together with an email to all final year students at teacher training colleges. It is imperative that schools pay close attention to the Department's guidance and take all reasonable steps to use the NISTR, in order to obtain the most cost effective means of providing substitute cover.

Part Three:

The Department has had only limited success in sustaining improvements in the level of sickness absence among teachers



Part Three:

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While there has been a modest decline in the average sick days taken by teachers, there are variations across the school sectors

- 3.1 In response to PAC recommendations, the Department and employing authorities have put in place clear procedures for managing sickness absences among teachers (see Appendix 1). However, individual schools are vital agents in delivering targeted reductions.
- 3.2 Average sickness levels for teachers stood at 10.1 days per annum in 2000-01¹⁸. By 2004-05, sickness levels had fallen to a low of 7.52 days; however they crept back up to 9.52 days in 2005-06. Since then the level has reduced gradually and currently stands at 7.81 days (see Figure 7). While we acknowledge the decrease since 2000-01, after the PAC report the Department set a target that it would aim to bring sickness absence levels into line with those in England. In 2001, sickness absence in England was 5.4 days per teacher¹⁹. This figure remained at this level in subsequent years and dropped to 5.0 days in 2008²⁰.
- 3.3 Figure 7 also highlights some interesting comparisons between school sectors and employing authorities. For example, average sickness absence in controlled schools is around 7.1 days, compared with 8.5 in the maintained sector. The regular Accountability Reviews (paragraph 2.5) held with employing authorities have provided the Department with the opportunity to stress to CCMS the need

for improvement in absence management in Catholic maintained schools. While the Catholic maintained sector has improved, it still lags behind the controlled sector.

Teachers in special schools have a particularly high level of absence – 9.73 days. According to the Department, in general, this reflects the challenging nature of teaching in a difficult setting.

- 3.4 Figure 8 provides an overview of the range of average sickness absence levels across all schools in 2008-09. Figure 9 provides further detail on the range of average sickness absence rates across employing authorities and sectors. Data for 2007-08 shows that around two thirds of all schools had an average sickness level of under 8 days. Data prepared for the Accountability Reviews shows, in the same year, 173 schools (about 13 per cent) were identified as having significantly improved on previous high levels of absence, while 127 schools (about ten per cent) were designated as having high absence levels. Comparative data for English, Scottish and Welsh schools for 2007-08 (Figure 10) shows that, while the performance of Northern Ireland schools is closer to that of schools in Scotland and Wales, they still have a substantially higher level of sickness absence than English schools.

18 See footnote 8

19 See footnote 7

20 The figure for England includes estimates for three local authorities who provided information that was either incomplete or not fully credible due to problems with their data recording.

Figure 7: Teachers' sickness absence by Board and Sector 2006-07 to 2008-09

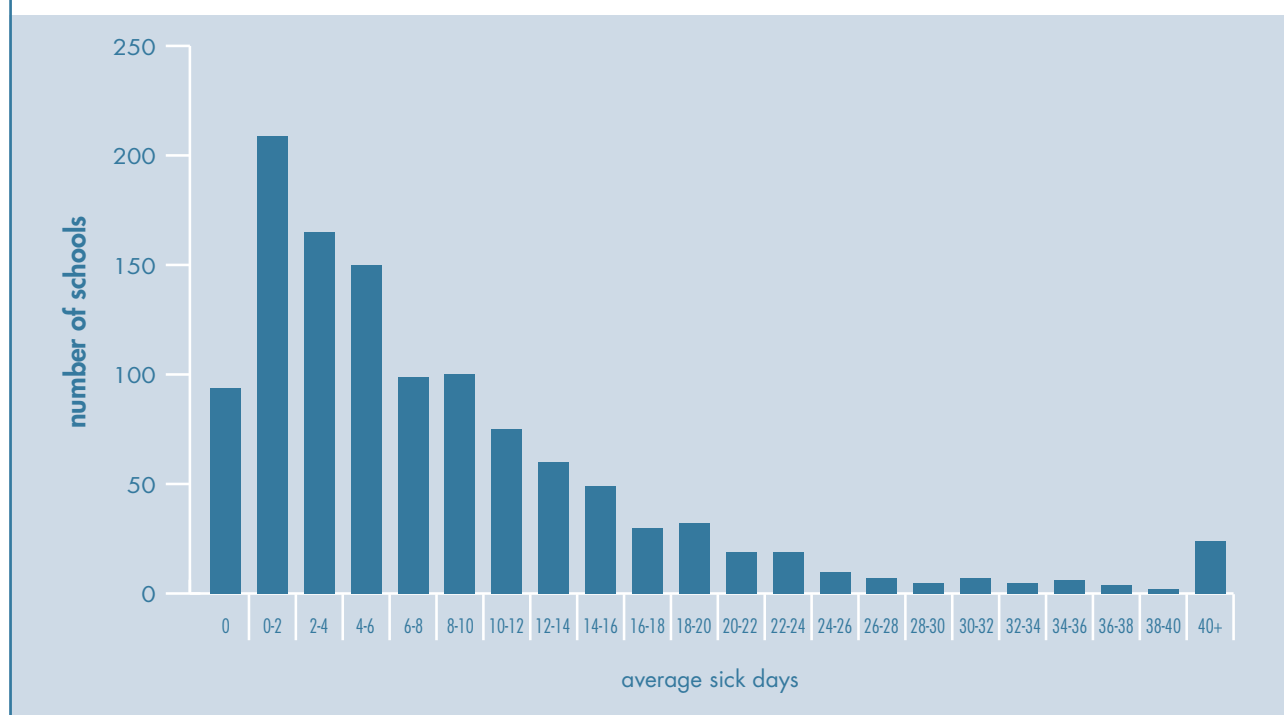
Board/ Sector	2006-07			2007-08			2008-09		
	Sick days	Permanent teachers in post	Sick days per teacher in post	Sick days	Permanent teachers in post	Sick days per teacher in post	Sick days	Permanent teachers in post	Sick days per teacher in post
Belfast	7,280	956	7.62	7,063	966	7.31	7,099	924	7.68
North Eastern	18,769	2,269	8.27	17,665	2,371	7.45	16,049	2,329	6.89
South Eastern	15,091	2,069	7.29	13,934	2,005	6.95	13,178	1,946	6.77
Southern	12,262	1,574	7.79	13,238	1,665	7.95	12,143	1,615	7.52
Western	6,946	880	7.89	6,743	928	7.27	6,406	895	7.16
Controlled Total	60,348	7,748	7.79	58,643	7,935	7.39	54,875	7,709	7.12
Catholic Maintained	71,215	6,719	10.60	64,621	6,614	9.77	56,830	6,610	8.60
Other Maintained	1078	158	6.82	1,054	166	6.35	1,046	184	5.68
Maintained Total	72,293	6,877	10.51	65,675	6,780	9.69	57,876	6,794	8.52
Special	10,636	857	12.41	10,484	841	12.47	8,326	856	9.73
GMI	8,218	903	9.10	6,872	931	7.38	6,433	990	6.50
Total	151,495	16,385	9.25	141,674	16,487	8.59	127,510	16,349	7.80

Source: Department

Part Three:

The Department has had only limited success in sustaining improvements in the level of sickness absence among teachers

Figure 8: Range of teachers' sickness absence across all schools, 2008-09



Source: Department

Figure 9: Range of teachers' sickness absence by employing authority, 2007-08*

Board/Sector	Lowest	Highest	Average
Belfast	0.00	49.00	7.31
North Eastern	0.00	126.50	7.45
South Eastern	0.00	32.67	6.95
Southern	0.00	140.50	7.95
Western	0.00	92.67	7.27
Catholic Maintained	0.00	90.25	9.77
GMI	0.00	22.82	7.38

Source: Department

* 2007-08 data used to allow comparison with the latest available GB data in Figure 10

Figure 10: Comparison of teachers' sickness absence rates, 2007-08*

Region	Sick days per teacher in post
North East	6.3
North West	6.3
Yorkshire and Humber	6.0
East Midlands	6.1
West Midlands	6.0
East of England	5.1
London	4.8
South East	4.5
South West	4.5
TOTALS	
England	5.4
Scotland	8.3
Wales	9.0
Northern Ireland	8.6

Source: Department, Department for Children, Schools and Families, Scottish Government Statistics, and Wales National Statistics.

* Latest available figures for comparative purposes

will facilitate a deeper understanding of comparative performance and help inform local practice on sickness absence management.

Greater effort is required to reduce teacher sickness absence so that potentially significant savings can be realised

3.7 As shown in Figure 3 (paragraph 2.3), cover for sickness absence cost over £11 million in 2008-09. In addition to the costs of substitution cover, another significant cost of teacher sickness absence is the ongoing salaries paid to the permanent teachers they replace. In 2008-09 the sick pay bill for teachers was £15.8 million. To demonstrate the potential financial effect of reducing sickness absences, we calculated that if current absence levels were reduced to those in England (ie. by 36 per cent), pro-rata savings on substitute teachers would be around £4 million, while the teaching and learning benefits of £5.7 million worth of permanent teachers' time would not be lost to the classroom – a total of over £9.5 million.

3.6 The lack of comprehensive management information (see paragraph 4) on teacher sickness absence across schools in Northern Ireland limits the extent to which it has been possible to benchmark the performance of local employing authorities against those in English regions. As a result, the precise reasons for differences in performance are not readily identifiable. The Department must establish a performance management system which

3.8 In addition to taking action to reduce sickness absences among teachers, the Department is considering ways of controlling substitution costs for sickness absence, for example:

- reducing the ceiling for centre reimbursement to a lower point on the teacher salary scale;
- requiring schools to meet half the substitution costs when an absent

Part Three:

The Department has had only limited success in sustaining improvements in the level of sickness absence among teachers

teacher moves on to half pay. This would encourage them to employ cheaper substitutes; and

- requiring schools to meet all the costs of substitution cover for sickness absence.

3.9 The comparative data presented in Figures 9 and 10 show that the performance gap between Northern Ireland schools and their English counterparts still exists. The Department told us that, in its view, a reduction in teacher sickness absences to the levels in English schools remains extremely challenging. While maintaining a balance between teaching time and an acceptable level of absence can prove difficult for school principals and employing authorities, we still believe that, based on the English experience, a staged reduction in teacher sickness absence to the levels in English schools remains a feasible goal. The Department told us that: the creation of ESA (see paragraph 2); ensuring that all schools work within the policy framework of *Every School a Good School*; and taking steps to strengthen school governance, industrial relations and staff support should yield further improvements in the levels of sickness absence among teachers.

The Department has only recently re-introduced targets for the reduction of teachers' sickness absence

3.10 Following the PAC report in 2003, the Department set the target suggested by the Committee, that the Boards and CCMS reduce teacher absence to the level in

English schools by 2008. The target was aimed at focussing attention on the potential savings from a reduction in the costs of substitution cover and from not losing the teaching and learning benefits of permanent teachers' time to the classroom.

3.11 The Department told us that, from the outset, it considered this target to be "ambitious", as potential savings were notional and not based on a robust definition of the cost of sick absence. While the target was highlighted in discussions with the Boards during the resource allocation planning process for the years 2005-06 to 2007-08, it has not been referred to since and the target was not achieved.

3.12 Following this period, the Department initially decided not to set a specific target for the reduction of teacher sickness absence. Rather, as part of its efficiency delivery plans, it set a target to reduce the overall costs of substitution by ten per cent by 2011. This was to be achieved through a range of measures to promote effective management of the school workforce, including the better use of ICT to reduce the extent to which teachers were away from the classroom, for example, on in-service training.

3.13 In our view, changing the nature of the target to one focussed on a reduction in the overall costs of substitution cover clouded the issue and failed to address the concerns the Westminster PAC expressed about sickness absence among teachers. In the course of our report, the Department re-established a target for teacher sickness

absence – a reduction to an average six days a year by 2010-11 – and, towards this, it has set individual target reductions for the employing authorities for 2009-10 (ranging from 7-15 per cent, depending on their performance to date).

3.14 We recognise that achieving the reductions in teacher absences envisaged by the Westminster PAC will be a big task, but in our view not impossible. We do not consider there is anything inherent in the nature of Northern Ireland schools, compared with those in England, which should make higher absence rates an inevitable feature of our school system. We acknowledge that the Department has re-established a target for the reduction of teacher absences. It is only by monitoring performance against targets that problems in the management of teacher attendance can be highlighted and positive action taken to address any deficiencies.

3.15 The importance of using targets was stressed by PAC in 2008 (see paragraph 2.10), with particular emphasis on the use of individual departmental targets. It also advocated the use of detailed action plans so that targets would be achieved. We recommend that the Department takes account of the Committee's proposals and seeks to ensure that such an approach is tailored to the management of teacher sickness absence within individual schools.

The impact of stress as a factor in teacher absences

3.16 It is difficult to isolate the reasons why sickness absence should be so much lower in England compared with Northern Ireland. Work-related stress among teachers is often highlighted as a particular problem and a survey²¹ in 2005 ranked teaching as the second most stressful job out of 26 occupations (more stressful, even, than being an ambulance driver).

3.17 Stress has been identified as a significant problem in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom. Paragraph 2.7 indicated work carried out in developing the new payroll system has enabled the Department to identify teacher sickness absences which are due to stress. Recent reports from the system show that stress absences accounted for 14 per cent of all sickness absence days in 2008-09. A confidential survey²² of teachers in Northern Ireland in 2001-02 had already raised important concerns:

- almost half of the respondents reported their jobs to be very or extremely stressful - too much work, too much administration and lack of time to prepare lessons;
- teaching principals found their jobs very stressful;
- teaching principals and heads of departments had lower job satisfaction and higher levels of stress compared to all other teachers; and

21 *The experience of work-related stress across occupations*, S.Johnson et al, Journal of Managerial Psychology, 178-187 (10), 2005

22 The health and wellbeing survey was undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers and received 12,500 responses (50 per cent)

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- a significant minority had been threatened with physical violence or experienced verbal abuse during the course of their careers.

3.18 It was partly in response to the Northern Ireland survey that a new Teacher Attendance Procedure, adopted by the Teachers' Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee (Schools), commonly known as the Teachers Negotiating Committee (TNC)²³ in 2008, included an emphasis on absences related to stress. Work is on-going through TNC to develop a Teacher Health and Wellbeing Strategy, while a centralised independent counselling service accessible to all teachers via a 24 hour confidential telephone helpline was introduced on 1 April 2009. The Department told us that guidance on tackling violence against teachers has also been drawn up by TNC for issue to all schools. This will include a desk-aid for every teacher. The Department said that the Committee is also drawing up a survey for issue to schools to gauge the extent and nature of teacher abuse.

3.19 A positive organisational background is critical for the success of any action taken to manage sickness absence. A report by OFSTED²⁴ in 2007 suggests that a remodelling of the school workforce in England, aimed at raising standards for pupils by freeing teachers from inappropriate and excessive workload, has helped to reduce stress. Part of the remodelling process was to introduce

limits on the amount of cover for absent colleagues that teachers and head teachers could provide while at the same time making new arrangements for deploying support staff. Employers and teachers' trades unions in Northern Ireland did not agree that support staff should be professionalised to undertake teaching-type duties; therefore, the only way to reduce teacher cover for absent colleagues is to employ substitute teachers.

3.20 The issues of teacher workload and bureaucratic burden were addressed in the Northern Ireland context by the "Curran Report"²⁵ in 2004. Its recommendations sought to bring teachers' conditions of service in Northern Ireland into line with those of their colleagues in England and Wales but, significantly, without workforce remodelling and, in particular, without the use of teaching assistants to undertake teaching-type duties. Instead, the report recommended "contextualising" the approach used in England (see Appendix 5) to suit circumstances in Northern Ireland. The Department told us that implementing all the workload recommendations of the report would place a significant demand on the education budget. As a result, to date, the Department has been able only to ensure that no primary school principal need spend more than three days a week in class contact.

3.21 The Department's view is that the workforce remodelling policy changes implemented in England may be one

23 The function of the Teachers Negotiating Committee is to negotiate the remuneration and terms and conditions of service of teachers in grant aided schools in Northern Ireland. It consists of members appointed to represent the Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, the Governing Bodies of Voluntary Grammar Schools, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education and the Comhairle Na Gaelscolaíochta and members appointed to represent the Trade Unions represented on the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council.

24 *Reforming and developing the school workforce*, Office for Standards in Education, 2007

25 Improving conditions, raising standards and negotiating arrangements, Final Report – Part 2, Teachers' Pay and Conditions of Service Inquiry, February 2004

reason why teacher absence rates are lower than in Northern Ireland. Given the funding constraints it has identified in pursuing a similar course in Northern Ireland, it will be important that it is able to demonstrate that actions to prevent or reduce teacher sickness absence can at least pay for themselves without creating a financial burden for the taxpayer. Cost-effectiveness evaluation is one criterion that can help the Department determine the most appropriate programmes, based on both the need to limit the costs associated with teacher absences and resources available.

The relationship between sickness absence and maternity leave requires Departmental attention

3.22 The Department drew our attention to the specific impact of sickness absence among female teachers following maternity leave. Around three quarters of the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland is female and each year around 1,000 will be on maternity leave. The Department told us that, in 2007-08, the number of teachers taking sickness absence immediately following maternity leave fell by 50 per cent compared with the previous year. According to the Department this is likely to be due to an extension, in 2007, in the maximum level of additional maternity leave to 26 weeks, and the extension of statutory maternity pay entitlement to 39 weeks. However, the Department told us that the relationship between maternity and sickness is a complex one and will require further research in the light of the

most recent statistics. There is, for example, evidence that some teachers are content to end their maternity leave early in order to avail of the more generous sick pay provisions.

Absence intervention strategies

3.23 While the Department carries ultimate accountability for teacher absence management across the school system, the employing authorities and schools should accept individual responsibility for absence management. An example of how teacher absence has been managed more proactively by the Western Board is outlined in Case Example 1.

Case Example 1 - Provision of accurate management information

The Western Board has prepared a suite of reports that enable schools to record and report internally for the first time on sickness related absence, through the C2K system. The system will allow schools in all Boards to focus on providing consistency of practice in the recording, monitoring and reporting of teacher absence. Following a successful initial pilot in a sample of nine schools in the Western Board area during the 2007-08 summer term, the reporting system has been rolled out across all schools in the Western Board. The reports allow principals and governors to quickly identify those teachers who have breached the relevant trigger points in the Managing Attendance Policy and enable management to take timely action to address any issues or concerns highlighted.

Part Three:

The Department has had only limited success in sustaining improvements in the level of sickness absence among teachers

- 3.24 The 2003 Westminster PAC report²⁶ recognised that, in addition to a focus on preventing absence, the management of absence also needed to promote and encourage a culture of attendance or wellbeing. Our report on staff absence across the Northern Ireland Civil Service²⁷ identified examples of good practice in the area of health promotion. For example, some bodies have provided free health screening for their employees, many have adopted a separate stress policy aimed at reducing the incidences of work-related stress, and some have offered discounted access to leisure and fitness facilities in an effort to improve general health. In particular, the Westminster PAC called for the piloting of counselling services for teachers. As noted at paragraph 3.18, a centralised independent counselling service accessible to all teachers via a 24 hour confidential telephone helpline has been in place since April 2009.
- 3.25 The beneficial effects of health promotion activity cannot be guaranteed and may not be as strong as anticipated. For example, over recent years, the Southern Board has had the highest spending on teacher welfare among the Boards but, as Figure 9 shows, it currently has the highest level of teacher sickness absence. In addition, according to the Department, CCMS would contend that the high level of absence among schools in the maintained sector may be, in part, the result of its ethos of pastoral care (sympathetic attitude) towards its staff.
- 3.26 We acknowledge the progress that has been made in reducing teacher sickness absence to the current average of 7.81 days (see paragraph 3.2). In order to sustain and improve on this performance, efforts to support attendance will be as important as those for deterring absence. The particular combination of approaches that will work best in any school or sector will, to some extent, depend upon an analysis of their sickness absence problem. In our view, the problems associated with the availability and use made of management information, as discussed in paragraphs 2.3 to 2.13, inhibit the effective targeting of action to deal with particular causes of absence. It is important that the Department and employing authorities develop reporting structures that allow an analysis of the causes of teacher sickness absence so that specific interventions can be put in place. In the Department's view, the establishment of ESA and a more extensive use of C2K by schools, should provide a more streamlined and consistent administrative context within which to develop and continuously improve effective management information and reporting systems.
- Implementation of best practice principles in schools has been poor**
- 3.27 In 2008, TNC updated its 1999 managing attendance policy and associated procedures in line with best practice literature.²⁸ Teacher Attendance Procedures now include these three basic steps:

26 See footnote 1

27 See footnote 16

28 *Current thinking on managing attendance: a short guide for HR professionals*, National Audit Office, The Institute for Employment Studies and The Institute of Work Psychology, A research paper, 2005.

- employing authorities should develop clear teacher attendance norms and expectations;
- when patterns of absence exceed norms, designated personnel should initiate a review and take additional action if necessary; and
- absence data should be analysed and regularly reported at school and employing authority level.

3.28 We found that the policy developed by TNC contains many of the elements necessary to improve the management of teacher attendance: it provides direction for the promotion of attendance; roles and responsibilities of school principals, governors and employing authorities are clearly established; procedures are set out to assist in the management of short and

long-term absences; and training has been made available for school principals and governors.

3.29 We note that the new policy strengthens the trigger points for management intervention that were contained in the previous policy (see Figure 11), in particular, the level of casual absence required for intervention has been reduced from 8 days to 6 days. Figure 11 also shows how the trigger points for teachers' sickness absence compare with those which operate in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

3.30 The Department told us that all the trigger points were the subject of lengthy discussion at TNC. The Department decided that the sacrifice of a trigger point for an individual absence rate was a fair compromise to secure an agreed

Figure 11: Comparison of teacher absence trigger points

1999 teacher sickness absence policy	2008 teacher sickness absence policy	NICS sickness absence policy
<p>Absences:</p> <p>a) More than 8 days casual absence in a rolling 12 month period</p> <p>b) continuous absence of four weeks or more</p> <p>c) more than three periods of absence, each of at least 3 days in a rolling 12 month period</p> <p>d) staff members with an absence rate of 5 per cent or more</p>	<p>Absences:</p> <p>a) more than 6 days casual absence in a rolling 12 month period</p> <p>b) continuous absence of 20 working days (or four weeks) or more</p> <p>c) related to stress</p>	<p>Absences:</p> <p>a) 4 occasions or 10 working days in a rolling 12-month period</p> <p>b) 20 working days</p>

Source: Department; Department of Finance and Personnel

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policy supported by the unions, especially as the five per cent trigger point was less rigorous than the six day trigger point. The new policy also includes a reference to the possible use of disciplinary procedures in cases of persistent short-term absence. The Department also pointed out that, in contrast to the previous imposed policy, the new Teacher Attendance Policy and Procedures are endorsed by the teacher trade unions.

- 3.31 The new policy requires "...governors to adopt and promote the Teacher Attendance Procedure..." However, we found evidence of inconsistent adherence to this direction by schools. For example, an internal audit investigation by the Southern Board revealed low levels of implementation of the new policy amongst schools within its area: only 69 per cent of controlled schools were found to have adopted the absence policy and only 44 per cent carried out return to work interviews. According to the Department, resistance to an attendance policy appears to be an historical problem in some schools where principals believe absence management to be the responsibility of employing authorities. Our 2008 report on sickness absence (see footnote 27) emphasised that best practice procedures are well known and are generally in place in the public sector, but there is little point in having good practice procedures if they are not being applied by management.
- 3.32 Training for the implementation of the new policy has consisted of awareness sessions aimed at governors and principals. Whilst

the feedback received from the training was positive, it was noted by employing authorities that, as with training in general, it had been difficult to persuade all principals and all relevant governors to attend training. We acknowledge that school governors are engaged in a voluntary capacity and, while they can be encouraged to undertake training, they cannot be compelled to do so. The situation is made more problematic by the fact that principals are responsible for rolling the policy out to staff in their schools. The 2008 PAC report (see footnote 14), identified senior management commitment as a fundamental prerequisite for a sustained and permanent reduction in absence.

3.33 We acknowledge that there are competing priorities for the resources allocated to training. However, we recommend that employing authorities must take steps to tackle this culture of resistance, to ensure absence management procedures are fully implemented and operating effectively in schools. One way of doing this would be to incorporate a review of the implementation of the policy into the Internal Audit programme for school visits.

- 3.34 Employing authorities should also consider the provision of skill based training in addition to information sessions on the new policy. Where needs have been identified, such as interview skills for those carrying out return to work interviews, employers should consider providing these (see case example 2).

Case example 2

In conjunction with the Regional Training Unit for Northern Ireland, CCMS is piloting training on the implementation of the managing attendance policy for a selection of school principals. This targeted training will seek to concentrate on the skills needed by principals to fully implement the policy amongst teachers, such as interviewing skills. During principals' meetings held in March 2008, skills-based training was identified as important to the successful implementation of the policy, by enabling principals to feel confident in carrying out the requirements of the policy.

Part Four:

Despite concerns raised by PAC at Westminster in 1992 and 2003, the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers continues at a significant level



Part Four:

Despite concerns raised by PAC at Westminster in 1992 and 2003, the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers continues at a significant level

Figure 12: Temporary days worked by retired teachers providing substitution cover, 2000-01 to 2008-09

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Efficient Discharge	3,656	3,395	3,369	2,737	2,473	2,478	2,224	2,367	2,225
Redundancy	40,922	50,211	53,382	54,140	50,204	48,394	49,542	57,983	60,085
Sub-total (premature)	44,578	53,606	56,751	56,877	52,677	50,872	51,766	60,350	62,310
Age	5,790	6,233	7,037	7,130	7,214	7,371	8,248	10,157	9,364
Infirmity	0	0	0	0	0	0	58	11	0
Actuarially Reduced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	148	459
Retired Total	50,368	59,839	63,788	64,007	59,891	58,243	60,072	70,666	72,133

Source: Department

Re-employment of prematurely retired teachers

4.1 In 1984 and again in 1988 the Department advised employing authorities that teachers who had been retired prematurely on grounds of redundancy or in the interests of efficient discharge should be re-employed as substitute teachers in **only the most exceptional circumstances**. However, despite this guidance, a report by NIAO in 1992²⁹ found that large numbers of prematurely retired teachers were still re-employed on a temporary basis. Our report in 2002 (see Footnote 5) returned to the issue and recorded that temporary days worked by retired teachers in providing substitution cover had risen from 34,000 in 1996-97 to just over 50,000 in 2000-01.

4.2 Figure 12 demonstrates that attempts to curb the use of prematurely retired teachers for substitution cover met with little success

in the subsequent years. Indeed, the number of days worked by prematurely retired teachers has increased by 40 per cent since 2000-01 and 75 per cent since 1996-97.

4.3 Figure 13 shows that the percentage of days worked by prematurely retired teachers is currently the same as in 2000-01. In 2008-09, the 62,310 substitution days worked by prematurely retired teachers equated to around 320 whole time equivalent permanent teachers. Additional statistics provided by the Department show that, while the number of substitution cover days worked by prematurely retired teachers has increased, the overall number of prematurely retired teachers who subsequently became re-employed in the year following their retirement has fallen by almost 60 per cent, from 386 in 2005-06 to 156 in 2008-09.

²⁹ Department of Education for Northern Ireland: Premature Retirement of Teachers, Northern Ireland Audit Office, February 1992, HC 248

Figure 13: Proportion of substitution cover provided by prematurely retired teachers 2000-01 to 2008-09

	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Total days worked by prematurely retired Teachers	44,578	53,606	56,751	56,877	52,677	50,872	51,766	60,361	62,310
Total substitution days	338,330	384,965	388,526	394,450	401,561	397,939	407,327	438,114	470,860
% prematurely retired	13.2	13.9	14.6	14.4	13.1	12.8	12.7	13.8	13.2

Source: Department

4.4 The Department told us that it would continue to build on the range of actions already being taken to discourage the practice of re-employing prematurely retired teachers:

- It has repeatedly asked employers to give preference to newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers who are seeking employment. In responding to the [2003] PAC report³⁰, the Department pointed out that guidance on the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers was re-issued to employing authorities (most recently in November 2006). The Department also told us that the NISTR (see paragraphs 1.4 and 2.20), launched in 2004, allows employers to monitor substitution cover and “robustly challenge” the over-use of retired teachers for substitution work;
- it has advised employers that retired teachers should only be re-employed to provide short-term cover where newly qualified teachers or experienced non-retired teachers are unavailable.

(However, the decision on whom to employ rests with the Board of Governors of each individual school);

- since 1999-2000 the level of central reimbursement for substitute cover costs has been capped at point 4 of the teacher salary scale (see paragraph 1.5). This provides an incentive for schools to employ newly qualified teachers for substitute cover, as opposed to more expensive prematurely retired teachers. (However, schools have the flexibility to engage higher cost teachers at a charge to the school budget, if they so desire); and
- in the Department’s view, the rules of the Teachers’ Pension Scheme also militate against the employment of retired teachers, in that such teachers may suffer a reduction in pension as a result of earnings from employment as a teacher. Teachers who benefit from a premature retirement package and are subsequently re-employed are entitled to earn up to the difference between their annual rate of salary prior to retirement

Part Four:

Despite concerns raised by PAC at Westminster in 1992 and 2003, the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers continues at a significant level

and their current pension before that pension is abated. The Department has strict controls in place to monitor such cases and employing authorities must ensure that there is a break of at least 29 days between a teacher's retirement and their re-engagement. We examined a sample of 20 teachers who had taken premature retirement on the grounds of redundancy in August 2007 and found that three had been re-employed as substitutes in the schools they retired from by March 2008. All three had received the maximum added years' compensation. Of the three, one had been re-employed on the first day allowable after the 29 day break and another on the second day.

4.5 The Department told us that the continuing difficulties surrounding the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers had been compounded by the prevalence of premature retirement among teachers. In its view this was due to the fact that, prior to April 2008, the costs of premature retirement were borne entirely by the Northern Ireland Teachers' Pension Scheme (NITPS) rather than by schools or the employing authorities. This system did not encourage employers to behave prudently and had resulted in the number of premature retirements running at over 500 a year, a level that would be unsustainable without a significant increase in the NITPS contribution rate. As a result, the Department considered that premature retirement had been the "soft" option for school management, and an attractive option for teachers because of the generous enhancement.

4.6 At 31 March 2008, almost 50 per cent of teachers on the NISTR were fifty years of age or more, with over a third aged between 50 and 59. Only a quarter of those on the Register were under 30 years of age (see Appendix 6). At the same time, 27 per cent of the 20,000 teachers currently employed in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland were over the age of 50. On the basis of these statistics, we consider that a reduction in the proportion of substitution cover days worked by prematurely retired teachers currently on the NISTR may take a significant period of time to be realised.

4.7 The Department explained that it has now taken action to address the issue of premature retirement. Recent changes to the Teachers' Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme require that, from 2008, the employing authorities have to bear the costs of any added years awarded to retiring teachers. According to the Department, this has effectively ended the practice of enhanced early retirement. In addition, an Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken on proposed draft regulations which would mean that, from 2010, employing authorities will also have to meet the cost of the early payment of unreduced pension benefits in cases where teachers are granted premature retirement. This means that employing authorities will then have to bear the full costs of premature retirement compensation. It should also be noted that the minimum pension age increased from 50 to 55 with effect from 6 April 2010. This is a matter of tax legislation and is contained in the 2004 Finance Act. Therefore, teachers aged

50-54 will no longer be eligible to be granted premature retirement and over time the percentage of teachers on NISTR in this age-bracket will reduce significantly.

- 4.8 In view of these changes and proposals, the Department anticipates that there will be a reduction in the number of early retirements to a sustainable and affordable level. In England, teachers have been subject to similar changes in arrangements for premature retirement compensation since 1997. Recent statistics show that, after an initial steep decline, the numbers retiring early are currently around 60 per cent of the former level (Appendix 7). Over time, therefore, it would be expected that the changes in Northern Ireland will have the effect of reducing the number of prematurely retired teachers available to schools for substitution cover. As a result, the Department expects that schools will have to look more frequently to newly qualified teachers for substitute cover and to fill temporary vacancies.
- 4.9 The Department is considering what further measures may be taken in respect of future premature retirements. It is likely that employing authorities will make increasing use of severance provision (planned for 2010 under the proposed new regulations) to secure the early release of teachers, rather than the more expensive premature retirement terms which involve early payment of full pension benefits. The re-employment of teachers who have been made redundant also cannot be prohibited, as there would be a risk that the Department could be subject to Tribunal claims by teachers prevented from applying for certain jobs. They would have to receive some form of compensation beyond the statutory minimum, with re-employment conditions attached.
- 4.10 One of the consequences of the re-employment of retired teachers is that it makes it more difficult for newly qualified teachers to secure temporary employment. The Department told us that prematurely retired teachers are rarely employed for two full terms so it is unlikely that engaging them for substitution cover will interfere with the induction of newly qualified teachers who require this period of employment to complete the induction process. However, the use of prematurely retired teachers for substitution cover can deprive newly qualified teachers of opportunities for valuable teaching experience. Falling school enrolments are also a factor in the availability of employment opportunities. The Department has taken action to reduce the numbers entering teacher training since 2004 by 27 per cent, however, it takes some years for this to impact on the overall number of newly qualified and recently qualified teachers seeking employment.
- 4.11 In terms of encouraging the employment of newly qualified and non-retired teachers, the Department told us that it is also exploring a number of other options, for example:
- reinforcing advice to schools through the issue of an annual circular reminding employing authorities of the need to ensure that schools fill vacancies on a permanent basis, except where the vacancy is of

Part Four:

Despite concerns raised by PAC at Westminster in 1992 and 2003, the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers continues at a significant level

a temporary nature; and giving preference where possible to newly qualified teachers when filling vacancies or employing substitutes;

- changing the balance in funding for substitution costs between central and delegated budgets;
- introducing a flat rate of pay for substitute teachers (likely to be challenged on legal grounds by teacher unions);
- suspending, rather than abating, pension payable to re-employed teachers who retire under the premature retirement scheme; and
- introducing a condition that, in some cases, teachers who accept premature retirement terms would be ineligible for future employment in grant-aided schools.

4.12 We acknowledge the action being considered to stem the increase in the use of prematurely retired teachers for substitution cover. It is also important that teacher workforce planning at a strategic level can ensure that the numbers of newly qualified teachers coming through the training system is in line with the numbers needed to fill vacancies and provide substitute cover given the numbers of re-employed teachers who continue to provide temporary cover in schools. The Department told us that it plans to undertake a School Workforce Review which is intended to provide a framework within which ESA can develop strategic plans for the education workforce, including teachers, and will include consideration of teacher supply and demand, recruitment and retention, professional and career development, and redundancy, retirement and re-employment.

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Report on The Management of Substitution Cover for Teachers (2003)

Update on commitments given by the Department of Education in Memorandum of Reply (CM 5953)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
<p>1. Given that substitute teachers constitute a much larger proportion of the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland than England, the Committee is surprised that the Inspectorate has not addressed the issue of substitute teaching earlier. The Department has assured us that it has now commissioned the Inspectorate to undertake a review and this will take place during the 2003-04 academic year.</p>	<p>The Department will inform the Committee of the outcome of the review of substitute teaching by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).</p>	<p>The ETI report 'A Survey of Substitute Teaching and its Management in Northern Ireland 2003-04' is available on the ETI website www.etini.gov.uk. The report identified a number of strengths and also a number of areas for improvement. ETI has monitored progress in the areas for improvement through ongoing, routine visits to schools and through discussions with the relevant officers from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) and the Department of Education. ETI continues to monitor the work and management of substitute teachers as part of the annual programme of inspections already established for schools and to draw any issues to the attention of schools, CASS and the Department.</p>
<p>2. We believe that greater independence from the Department would improve the Northern Ireland Inspectorate's standing both within and beyond the education community.</p>	<p>The Department will pursue the Committee's view on greater independence for the ETI in discussion with the relevant Ministers.</p>	<p>There are now separate, published Memoranda of Understanding between ETI and the Department, DCAL and DEL indicating that ETI is independent of the Service providers; and business between ETI and the three Departments is governed by SLAs. A small interdepartmental working group, established to consider the financial and budgetary arrangements between ETI and the Department, DCAL and DEL, has reported to the relevant Permanent Secretaries, and the report has been endorsed. The legislation governing inspection and ETI is being revised within the context of RPA.</p>

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
<p>3. There should be better mechanisms in place to support substitute teachers. We find it remarkable that substitute teachers can be put in regular charge of classes without proper induction, training and performance evaluation. We are pleased that the Department is to give serious consideration to formalising the evaluation of substitute teachers and we look forward to it taking prompt action on the outcome of its deliberations.</p>	<p>The Department, through the employing authorities, will circulate to all schools a Best Practice Guide addressing all aspects of the management of substitution, including induction, training, performance management and the establishment of appropriate mechanisms to support substitute teachers.</p> <p>Regarding performance evaluation, work will commence on a School Development and Performance Management Scheme at the start of the 2003-04 school year.</p> <p>The ETI will evaluate performance as part of its review of substitute teachers.</p>	<p>A Best Practice Guide, which addresses all aspects of the management, training and support for substitute teachers, was prepared by the Beginning Teachers Group, an inter-Board group. The Guide issued to all schools and employing authorities in 2006.</p> <p>A Performance Review and Staff Development (PRSD) Scheme was introduced in all schools in Northern Ireland from September 2005. The Scheme involves the setting of objectives for each teacher and an appraisal at the end of the school year of the extent to which these objectives have been met. PRSD can therefore apply only to substitute teachers employed for planned periods of a duration for which objectives can reasonably be set. It cannot therefore apply to substitute teachers employed for short periods on a casual basis, whose performance will need to be monitored, and feedback provided, by their line managers as and when they are employed.</p> <p>ETI continues to monitor the work and management of substitute teachers as part of the annual programme of inspections already established for schools and to draw any issues to the attention of schools, CASS and the Department.</p>

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
<p>4. The Committee stresses that the regulation of employment agencies supplying teachers needs to be robust. We also welcome the fact that the Boards will be establishing a pilot scheme to examine the cost/benefits of setting up their own "pooling" arrangements whereby head teachers could access a centralised database to book substitute teachers on-line.</p>	<p>The Department will work with the Boards on the establishment of pooling arrangements for substitute teachers and evaluate the pilot of an on-line system proposed by the Boards and CCMS.</p> <p>The Department will review and update the existing guidance regarding checks to be undertaken on substitute teachers supplied by employment agencies.</p> <p>The ETI will review the extent to which schools have complied with the guidance as part of its review of substitute teachers.</p>	<p>The NI Substitute Teachers' Register (NISTR) was established in March 2004. When teachers join NISTR, a pre-employment criminal record check is carried out (subsequent checks are then carried out every two years thereafter) and checks are carried out to ensure that the teacher is eligible to teach, satisfies relevant health requirements and is registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Following a successful testing period of the NISTR on-line booking system, it was made available to all Board areas from February 2007 and the last Board areas went live during April 2007. NISTR now has almost 7,000 teachers registered. The electronic interface to payroll has encouraged schools to use the register and around 60% of substitute days are now booked through NISTR. The Department intends to make use of the register mandatory for booking substitution by qualified teachers at the beginning of the 2008-09 academic year.</p> <p>ETI's ongoing programme of inspections has raised no concerns to date.</p>
<p>5. The Committee pointed out to the Department the savings made by some English education authorities that have established redeployment "pools" of teachers. We recommend, therefore, that the Department should examine thoroughly the cost/benefits of establishing redeployment "pools" of teachers in order to decide whether to take powers to facilitate their introduction within the Boards.</p>	<p>The Department will initiate in September 2003 a review of the arrangements for retirement on grounds of redundancy.</p> <p>The Department will examine the costs, benefits and practicalities of a Redeployment Agreement between the employing authorities and the recognised teacher unions. Current legislation will also be examined and, if necessary, powers sought to implement any agreed solution.</p>	<p>See response to Conclusion 7 below.</p> <p>The Department set up a Working Group to examine the benefits, the costs and the practicalities involved in connection with the establishment of re-deployment pool(s). The report of the Redeployment Working Group considered the cost effectiveness of the current position of allowing</p>

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
		<p>transferred redundancies against alternative options: namely, ceasing the practice of allowing Transferred Redundancy; or creating a Teacher Reserve Pool. The appraisal concluded that the difference in both monetary and non-monetary terms between the alternative options was negligible and that either of these options would provide an improved position. The Department has now moved to 'hard charge' employers for the cost of enhanced pension awarded to prematurely retired teachers from April 2008. This will bring about a significant reduction in the number of transferred redundancies/premature retirements. A working group has been set up to facilitate the introduction of hard charging for the full cost of premature retirement compensation from April 2009. This should bring about further downward pressure on numbers, and the need for new redeployment arrangements will be revisited at that time in conjunction with the new Education and Skills Authority.</p> <p>See response to Conclusions 7-10 below.</p>
<p>6. We recommend that the Department comes to an early decision about the teaching workforce it needs and takes urgent action to strengthen its strategic planning to achieve it.</p>	<p>The Department will take action to improve the management of substitution and absenteeism.</p> <p>The Teacher Demand Model will be re-examined in the Autumn of 2003.</p>	<p>An independent review of the TDM was carried out by NISRA and its report received in May 2004. The review concluded that the model, which is similar to that used in England and Wales, is robust in terms of its predictive analysis. The review highlighted a number of minor issues to be considered for amendment within the model. These recommended changes were introduced in respect of teacher education intakes for September 2005.</p>

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
<p>7. We recommend that the Inspectorate re-establishes its role in the monitoring and evaluation of the premature retirement of teachers. In view of the Department's poor record of action, we are asking the C&AG to give particular attention to monitoring these issues.</p>	<p>The Department will review and monitor rigorously the implementation of previous commitments made to the PAC on the re-employment of prematurely retired teachers as well as those contained in this MOR.</p> <p>The Department will take measures to ensure that opportunities for permanent employment are given to newly qualified teachers and that they are not displaced by long-term substitution by prematurely retired teachers. The Department will write to employing authorities highlighting the problem and the need for schools, employers and the Department to have effective arrangements in place to ensure improvement.</p> <p>The Department will consider carefully the report of the ETI review of 2002 Efficient Discharge retirements.</p>	<p>Guidance issued by the Department (reissued in November 2006) exhorts employers to give preference to newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers who are seeking employment. The Department has also advised employers that retired teachers should only be re-employed to provide short-term cover where newly qualified teachers or experienced non-retired teachers are unavailable. The capping of the levels of the central reimbursement of the costs of substitute cover also provides an incentive for schools to employ newly qualified teachers as substitutes.</p> <p>The NI Substitute Teachers' Register, launched in 2004, allows employers to monitor the availability of non-retired teachers and this information enables them to mount a more robust challenge where schools employ an unqualified or prematurely retired teacher.</p> <p>The Department has reviewed the arrangements for Premature Retirement Compensation (both Redundancy and Efficient Discharge) and taken action to control the costs associated with premature retirement by making employing authorities liable for any enhanced pension they decide to award. This will have the effect of reducing the amount of compensation available and may, in turn, lead to a reduction in the number of teachers deciding to avail of premature retirement.</p>

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
		<p>The Education & Training Inspectorate produced a report entitled "The Effectiveness of the Efficient Discharge Scheme" in November 2003. The weaknesses identified in the report were addressed in the revised guidelines issued 24 November 2006.</p>
<p>8. Sickness absence rates among teachers in Northern Ireland are much higher than their counterparts in England and the Committee is disturbed that the Department has failed to set targets for their reduction. We recommend that the Department develops an action plan and establishes sickness reduction targets aimed at achieving the savings identified in the C&AG's Report.</p>	<p>The Department will write to employing authorities other than ELBs highlighting the Committee's conclusions and recommendations regarding teacher absences and emphasising the need for each school to set targets.</p> <p>The Department will develop arrangements to ensure that the performance of individual schools is subject to regular monitoring by the Department.</p> <p>The Department will draw up a plan setting out action in four key areas:</p>	<p>The Permanent Secretary wrote as indicated on 12 September 2003.</p> <p>Arrangements are in place for biannual monitoring of teacher absences at school level.</p>
<p>8.1 Management of attendance policy.</p>	<p>The Department will ensure that employing authorities implement their common policies and procedures on managing attendance more effectively and provide training for schools.</p>	<p>The employing authorities have renewed their commitment to monitoring levels of absence and to investigation and support of those schools with the worst absence records. The Teacher Attendance Procedure has been the subject of a major overhaul to close loopholes in the management of both casual and long-term sick absence. Revisions include the need to self-certify from the first day of any absence; a tightening of trigger points for management intervention; and a duty on employing authorities to ensure that school governors and principals are trained in the use of the procedure. Teacher absence levels are now also an item on the agendas of Board of Governors meetings.</p>

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
8.2 Health awareness programmes for staff.	A top-level group established by the Department and the employing authorities will take forward the recommendations of the 2002 report on Teachers' Health and Well-being.	<p>The top level group last met towards the end of 2005. Its work finished with the production of the report of the Teacher Health and Well being Strategy Group which was completed in February 2006. Management Side of the Teacher Negotiating Committee considered the report's recommendations and accepted a limited number of them. A sub-group of the TNC Joint Working Party was established to bring forward a workable action plan to include consideration of the existing counselling services offered by employing authorities.</p> <p>Employing authorities have agreed to develop a more consistent approach to the provision of welfare services and to centralise the provision of counselling services, including a 24-hour telephone helpline available to all teachers. The Department is working with the employing authorities to address assaults on and abuse of teachers. A workshop is planned for the autumn with head-teacher and teacher representatives, the employing authorities, legal advisors and PSNI to explore the scale of the problem and review the adequacy of existing guidance.</p>
8.3 Management information.	A Group established by the Department to improve management information about teacher sickness absences will examine the approach elsewhere in the public service in NI and GB and identify appropriate benchmarking information.	The Department continues to work with employing authorities to establish improved benchmarking information and to improve the quality of information available. A data mining pilot was completed to determine the potential business benefits for the Department including the provision of meaningful, informative, accurate and timely management information. Four data sources were selected at random, one of them being Teacher Absences.

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
		<p>Two software products were used in the pilot, Cognos and Diver. The pilot did conclude that there were benefits in using data mining tools to analyse and present management information. In the case of teachers' absences the lessons learnt from the pilot contributed to the Operational Requirements for the Teachers' Payroll Replacement System. The development of that system is well under way and Cognos software is being used in it as the preferred data mining and presentation tool.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the new computerised payroll system will improve the recording of information on substitution cover and also the nature of sickness absence; and that it will assist with the provision of information for benchmarking. Full implementation for payroll is currently scheduled for end March 2009 and pensions by end December 2009.</p>
8.4 Inspection	The ETI will give a higher priority to the examination of absence and substitution as part of each major inspection. The Department will take appropriate action where concerns are highlighted.	The Inspectorate continues to ensure that arrangements for substitute cover are considered within all major inspections. In general, all teachers, regardless of whether they are substitute or permanent, are treated equally in terms of inspection coverage, and no concerns have been so significant (in relation to the issues in question) in the sample of inspections so far as to have required a follow-up by the Department.
9. In the Committee's view, reducing sickness absence is not rocket science. The Department needs to explore with the employers and schools the reasons for high sickness absence rates and ensure	The Department will work closely with all employing authorities to explore with them the reasons for the high sickness absence rates and to identify the actions necessary to resolve deficiencies.	The employing authorities have renewed their commitment to monitoring levels of absence and to investigation and support of those schools with the worst absence records.

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
<p>that Boards and schools benchmark their management practices against those with better records, both within Northern Ireland and across Great Britain, in order to identify and remedy their deficiencies.</p>	<p>The Department will ensure that Boards and schools benchmark their management practices against those with better records both within NI and across GB.</p>	<p>Having considered the results of research in England and Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, they are currently progressing a number of measures that may be expected to have a positive impact on absenteeism. These include the development of a strategy to improve teacher health and well-being, including more consistent and effective provision of welfare and counselling services; and a major revision of the Managing Attendance policy. ELBs have been required, in their Resource Allocation Plans, to give details of their targets for reducing sickness absence levels, which must be sufficiently robust.</p>
<p>10. The Committee agrees that teachers' employers should pilot the use of counselling services in schools. We recommend that they and the Department should promptly review the results of the pilots and expand the provision of these services where there is a clear business case for doing so.</p>	<p>The Department and employing authorities will review the results of a pilot set up by the employing authorities during the 2003-04 school year to build upon the use of counselling services, and will expand the provision of these services where it can be shown to be in the interests of schools and where there is a clear business case to do so.</p>	<p>The report of the Teacher Health and Well being Strategy Group was completed in February 2006. Management Side of TNC considered the report's recommendations and accepted a limited number of them. A sub-group of the TNC Joint Working Party was established to bring forward a workable action plan to include consideration of the existing counselling services offered by employing authorities.</p> <p>The issue of counselling services could not be addressed separately from the work of the Teachers Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group. The Group's report was finalised in February 2006 and contained a recommendation about counselling - this is now being taken forward after long debate by Management Side. There was therefore no pilot exercise in 2003-04.</p>

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
		<p>The BELB agreed to lead on behalf of all employing authorities and has brought forward options for greater consistency of provision across employers. This includes an assessment of the financial implications of a standard approach and a blueprint for a unified counselling service in the future. This has been agreed by Management Side of TNC and will be rolled out during 2008-09.</p>
<p>11. It appears that a culture of high absenteeism may have been allowed to develop in some parts of the teaching workforce in Northern Ireland, which gives rise to a particular concern about how this will impact on pupils' learning. Even if teacher absenteeism does not induce similar behaviour among pupils, it is clear that schools and the education system in general have a key role to play if this culture is to be changed.</p>	<p>The Department will further engage all interested parties in the education sector to ensure that all appropriate remedial action is taken on the issue of absenteeism.</p>	<p>In their Resource Allocation Plans, ELBs have been required to give details of their targets for reducing the incidence of sickness absence among teachers. The Permanent Secretary holds Accountability Reviews with the Chief Executives of all the Employing Authorities at which levels of sickness absence are discussed.</p>
<p>13. A basic step in managing both teacher substitution cover and sickness absence would be to establish accurate and comprehensive information on their levels, patterns and costs. The Department needs to take urgent action to ensure that improved recording arrangements are introduced so that reliable and easily accessible data is available on the use of substitution cover and the nature of sickness absence.</p>	<p>The Department will review the current processes and initiate appropriate action to ensure that weaknesses are addressed in the accuracy, recording and accessibility of information on teachers' absences and substitution cover.</p>	<p>The Department continues to work with employing authorities to establish improved benchmarking information and to improve the quality of information available. A data mining pilot was completed to determine the potential business benefits for DE including the provision of meaningful, informative, accurate and timely management information. Four data sources were selected at random, one of them being Teacher Absences. Two software products were used in the pilot, Cognos and Diver. The pilot did conclude that there were benefits in using data mining tools to</p>

Appendix 1: (paragraphs 1.2 and 3.1)

PAC Conclusion	Departmental Commitment	Action Taken by Department
		<p>analyse and present management information. In the case of teachers' absences the lessons learnt from the pilot contributed to the Operational Requirements for the Teachers' Payroll Replacement System. The development of that system is well under way and Cognos software is being used in it as the preferred data mining and presentation tool.</p> <p>It is anticipated that the new computerised payroll system will improve the recording of information on substitution cover and also the nature of sickness absence; and that it will assist with the provision of information for benchmarking. Full implementation for payroll is currently scheduled for end March 2009 and pensions by end December 2009.</p>

Appendix 2: (paragraphs 1.3 and 1.5)

Extract from Common funding scheme 2008-09

Staff costs – substitution

Where teacher substitution costs are paid from centre funds, this is limited to a maximum of point M4 on the teachers' scale in the current financial year *and any substitution costs in excess of this are charged to the school's delegated budget.* The only exception to this general rule is where the substitute teacher has been employed as cover for a teacher who is an accredited representative and is engaged on trade union business.

The following are the circumstances where the costs of substitute employees (teaching and non-teaching) will be met from centre funds:

Absences owing to illness

Schools with more than 4 FTE teachers – where a permanent member of staff is absent for up to and including 20 consecutive working days, substitution costs are a charge to the school's LMS budget. Where a permanent member of staff is absent in excess of 20 working days, substitution costs from the 21st day of illness are a charge to the centre.

Schools with 4 FTE teachers or less – where a permanent member of staff is absent for up to and including 10 consecutive working days, substitution costs are a charge to the school's LMS budget. Where a permanent member of staff is absent in excess of 10 working days, substitution costs from the 11th day of illness are a charge to the centre.

In the event of the absent teacher going on to no pay, the cost of the substitute teacher will be met in full by the school from within its delegated budget

- b) For special leave where this has been granted with full pay for the following reasons:
- as an international sport representative;
 - as a lay magistrate;
 - jury service;
 - security forces; and
 - District Policing Partnership.
- c) Where the teacher has been required to:
- participate in working parties established by the Board, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools or Department and where the teacher has a timetabled teaching commitment;
 - moderate examinations accredited to the National Qualifications Framework;
 - be involved in the transfer procedure; or
 - engage in curricular development activity at the instigation of CCEA.
- d) For absences as an accredited trade union representative, provided these are in accordance with the facilities agreement.

Appendix 2: (paragraphs 1.3 and 1.5)

- e) For other representational duties where the person is a member of an ELB; CCMS; NICIE or CnaG or General Teaching Council. Where substitute cover is provided for a member of staff who is absent on account of their activities as a District Councillor or a representative on a Health Board, support from centre funds will be limited to 5 days in a financial year.
 - f) Where the member of staff is required to attend a Court or Industrial Tribunal, on behalf or at the request of the school or employing authority.
 - g) For the following staff development and INSET activities:
 - approved INSET, whether school or Board based;
 - RTU training; or
 - training associated with Health and Safety.
 - h) Where a member of staff has been suspended on full pay.
 - i) Other exceptional circumstances which may be approved by the Funding Authority.
-

Appendix 3: (paragraph 2.1)

Analysis of expenditure* on substitute teachers by Board/Sector

Board /Sector	2000-01 £	2001-02 £	2002-03 £	2003-04 £	2004-05 £	2005-06 £	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £
Belfast Area Controlled	3,547,007	3,896,606	4,363,635	4,376,270	3,929,277	3,957,451	4,538,220	5,313,751	5,566,337
Belfast Area Maintained	3,298,642	3,362,822	3,804,440	4,040,876	3,788,370	4,039,392	4,064,755	4,749,935	5,242,219
Belfast Total	6,845,649	7,259,428	8,168,075	8,417,146	7,717,647	7,996,843	8,602,975	10,063,686	10,808,556
North Eastern Area Controlled	5,941,844	6,382,933	6,976,664	7,273,613	6,880,469	7,793,489	8,077,705	9,034,049	10,130,239
North Eastern Area Maintained	2,352,102	2,585,127	2,981,728	3,175,307	2,896,761	3,333,236	3,315,695	3,691,224	4,211,609
North Eastern Total	8,293,946	8,968,060	9,958,392	10,448,920	9,777,230	11,126,725	11,393,400	12,725,273	14,341,848
South Eastern Area Controlled	5,063,726	5,524,543	6,111,450	6,359,414	5,810,510	6,368,488	6,502,737	7,269,713	8,649,783
South Eastern Area Maintained	2,098,703	2,389,533	2,481,780	2,799,536	2,612,263	2,963,058	2,800,967	3,296,521	3,747,126
South Eastern Total	7,162,429	7,914,076	8,593,230	9,158,950	8,422,773	9,331,546	9,303,704	10,566,234	12,396,909
Southern Area Controlled	3,482,083	3,554,899	3,936,484	4,557,671	4,411,818	4,873,726	5,323,086	5,718,332	6,344,980
Southern Area Maintained	4,513,655	5,236,621	5,296,475	5,494,492	5,674,501	6,458,004	6,466,054	7,337,686	8,286,440
Southern Total	7,995,738	8,791,520	9,232,959	10,052,163	10,086,319	11,331,730	11,789,140	13,056,018	14,631,420
Western Area Controlled	2,643,056	3,096,702	3,246,097	3,304,024	3,223,564	3,843,356	4,179,420	4,218,752	4,255,237
Western Area Maintained	3,725,302	3,814,011	4,547,663	4,952,710	4,955,716	5,234,171	5,218,244	6,045,657	6,887,420
Western Total	6,368,358	6,910,713	7,793,760	8,256,734	8,179,280	9,077,527	9,397,664	10,264,409	11,142,657
GMI	1,255,847	1,392,736	1,457,037	1,481,713	1,632,984	1,838,754	2,249,699	2,487,915	2,754,099
Total*	37,921,967	41,236,533	45,203,453	47,815,626	45,816,233	50,703,125	52,736,582	59,163,535	66,075,489
At 2008-09 prices**	46,876,853	49,913,495	53,071,892	54,465,294	50,904,663	55,212,916	55,869,758	60,923,619	66,075,489

* Data includes "daily" and "hourly" cover. Daily cover accounts for over 90 per cent of all costs. Totals may not match due to rounding
** calculated using HM Treasury's latest GDP deflator tables (2008-09 = 100)

Appendix 4: (paragraph 2.1)

Analysis of expenditure on substitute teachers by Phase

Board /Sector	2000-01 £	2001-02 £	2002-03 £	2003-04 £	2004-05 £	2005-06 £	2006-07 £	2007-08 £	2008-09 £
Nursery	545,579	562,437	735,930	649,167	662,483	900,387	966,084	976,124	963,856
Primary	21,606,842	23,810,829	25,531,850	26,158,269	24,567,870	26,821,717	27,562,165	31,418,807	35,650,242
Secondary	10,446,304	10,722,793	12,146,943	13,150,531	12,696,958	14,422,519	15,000,862	16,550,898	18,225,941
Grammar	1,190,283	1,209,192	1,397,069	1,648,704	1,656,230	1,852,626	2,014,745	2,102,842	2,365,841
Special	2,702,946	3,263,813	3,494,167	3,645,448	3,524,368	3,848,817	3,976,749	4,247,795	4,211,593
Peripatetic	174,167	274,733	440,457	1,081,795	1,075,062	1,018,306	966,279	1,379,155	1,903,918
Supply	0	0	0	0	278	0	0	0	0
GMI Primary	515,767	518,034	510,853	595,481	579,180	682,355	774,814	822,571	928,083
GMI Secondary	740,079	874,702	946,184	886,231	1,053,804	1,156,398	1,474,884	1,665,343	1,826,015
Total*	37,921,967	41,236,533	45,203,453	47,815,626	45,816,233	50,703,125	52,736,583	59,163,535	66,075,489

* data includes "daily" and "hourly" cover. The former accounts for over 90 per cent of all costs. Totals may not match due to rounding

Appendix 5: (paragraph 3.20)

Key features of the 2003 National Agreement in England and Wales

The Agreement includes a seven point plan for creating time for teachers and head-teachers:

1. Progressive reductions in teachers' overall hours over the next four years. This objective will be promoted by all the partners and progress will be monitored and audited, including at school level;
 2. Changes to teachers' contracts, to ensure all teachers, including head-teachers:
 - do not routinely undertake administrative and clerical tasks;
 - have a reasonable work/life balance;
 - have a reduced burden of providing cover for absent colleagues;
 - have guaranteed planning, preparation and assessment time within the school day, to support their teaching, individually and collaboratively;
 - have a reasonable allocation of time in support of their leadership and management responsibilities; and that head-teachers have dedicated time which recognises their significant leadership responsibilities for their school.
 3. A concerted attack on unnecessary paperwork and bureaucratic processes for teachers and head-teachers, including in England through the establishment of an Implementation Review Unit;
 4. Reform of support staff roles to help teachers and support pupils. Personal administrative assistants for teachers, cover supervisors and high level teaching assistants will be introduced;
 5. The recruitment of new managers, including business and personnel managers, and others with experience from outside education where they have the expertise to contribute effectively to schools' leadership teams;
 6. Additional resources and national "change management" programmes, to help school leaders achieve in their schools the necessary reforms of the teaching profession and restructuring of the school workforce
 7. Monitoring of progress on delivery by the Signatories to this Agreement.
-

Appendix 6: (paragraph 4.6)

Number of teachers registered with GTCNI and on the NISTR, March 2008

Age Range	Number	%
24 and under	705	9.4
25-29	1,243	16.6
30-34	600	8.1
35-39	458	6.2
40-44	410	5.5
45-49	364	5.0
50-54	928	12.5
55-59	1,602	21.5
60-64	950	12.8
65 and over	175	2.4
Total	7,435	100

Appendix 7: (paragraph 4.8)

Financial year	England & Wales		Northern Ireland	
	Premature Retirements ³¹	Premature as % of total retirements	Premature Retirements	Premature as % of total retirements
1990-91	7,740	50	340	57
1991-92	6,530	48	353	62
1992-93	7,170	49	261	50
1993-94	8,030	49	229	42
1994-95	7,120	45	207	41
1995-96	8,600	50	180	33
1996-97	10,210	55	278	43
1997-98	11,350	62	390	51
1998-99 ³²	2,370	28	318	45
1999-00	2,650	29	299	44
2000-01	3,150	31	407	51
2001-02	3,470	34	323	46
2002-03	3,950	36	348	46
2003-04	4,930	39	361	49
2004-05	6,050	43	377	50
2005-06	6,640	46	584	60
2006-07 ³³	7,460	43	555	55
2007-08	7,440	41	558	57
2008-09	7,880	41	311	42
2009-10	N/A	N/A	173 ³⁴	35

Source: Pensioner Statistical System (PENSTATS); Department

31 Includes Actuarially Reduced Benefit retirements from 2000-01.

32 Figures from 1998-99 onwards continue to be subject to slight revision due to the addition of retrospective awards and suspension of pension benefits where teachers return to service.

33 Figures from 2006-07 onwards are provisional estimates.

34 As at 28 February 2010.

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Title	HC/NIA No.	Date Published
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Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes in Northern Ireland	NIA 73/08-09	14 January 2009
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ISBN 978-0-337-09616-7



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