



# Teacher Retention and Turnover Research

Research Update 2

Teacher Dynamics in Multi-Academy Trusts



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# Teacher Retention and Turnover Research

## Research Update 2: Teacher Dynamics in Multi-Academy Trusts

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# About this research

## What is the extent of staff redeployment across multi-academy trusts, and why might it matter?

In this Research Update, we present evidence on how teachers and senior leaders are redeployed within multi-academy trusts (MATs), analysing the extent to which staff move to different schools in the same MAT. We show that the amount of staff movement between schools in the same MAT is relatively high and is particularly high in large MATs that are geographically clustered close together. Our analysis also shows that when teachers move to a school in the same MAT they are more likely to move to a school with a more disadvantaged intake than one with a less disadvantaged intake, which isn't the case in other schools.

This Research Update is the second publication in a series that is part of a major new research project by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), which is funded by a grant from the Nuffield Foundation. The first Research Update presented differences in teacher retention rates by the subject they teach. The project aims to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the teacher workforce in England. The study will inform policy makers and system leaders to help formulate effective responses to this complex issue and meet the challenge of increasing demand for teachers. We will produce a series of evidence-based outputs throughout 2017 to share knowledge about where policy interventions and practice might usefully focus in future.

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### Nuffield Foundation

The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust that aims to improve social wellbeing in the widest sense. It funds research and innovation in education and social policy and also works to build capacity in education, science and social science research. The Nuffield Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation. More information is available at [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org).



**Multi-academy trusts (MATs) are an important and growing feature of the school landscape in England. As the legal employer of all staff within the MAT, theoretically leaders can take a more strategic approach to staff deployment within the MAT and get teachers and leaders to where they are most needed.**

**Our analysis shows that staff moves to different schools within the same MAT are relatively high, concentrated among senior leaders and more likely to be to schools with more disadvantaged intakes. Staff movement tends to be highest in larger MATs that are closer together.**

# Key findings and conclusions

## The level of staff movement within a MAT is relatively high

Around ten per cent of teaching staff working in a MAT move to another school each year, higher than the average among all schools (seven per cent). One in ten of those MAT teachers (one per cent overall) move to another school in the same MAT. This rises to three per cent of staff who move into and between senior leadership posts in the same MAT.

Teacher movement of one per cent per year within MATs seems relatively low. But the amount of staff movement between schools in the same MAT is more than ten times higher than the amount of movement we would expect between any two schools that are not in the same MAT and are the same geographical distance apart. This suggests that MATs have internal teacher labour markets that are somewhat distinct from the teacher labour market in the local area outside of the MAT.

Our analysis captures permanent moves and secondments from one school to another but, as the School Workforce Census is an annual snapshot, it cannot capture more informal between-school staff deployment, such as staff cover, short-term loans or teaching across more than one school.

## What is causing greater staff movement within MATs?

There are several possible explanations for why staff movement within MATs is greater than between schools generally. MAT leaders may take an active role in deploying staff to different schools within the MAT. As MAT CEOs are responsible for a number of schools, they are better incentivised to take a strategic approach to redeployment that sees staff moved to where they are most needed.

MAT leaders may also be keen to use the range of opportunities that exist across their MAT to develop leadership pipelines from within and give their teachers career progression opportunities. The Department for Education's good practice guidance for MATs recommends that MATs "grow and develop the next middle and senior leaders by deploying them across a group of schools" (DfE, 2016a).

Other possible explanations are that information about vacancies within a MAT is likely to be more easily available to staff in the MAT than to staff outside, and a greater level of standardisation and consistency of approach may exist between schools in the same MAT, enabling smoother transitions if teachers move.

## Large MATs clustered together have the most staff movement

The average proportion of teachers that move from one school in a MAT to another school in the same MAT is greater where the number of schools in the MAT is larger. For MATs of a given size, the proportion of staff that move to a different school in the same MAT is greater where the schools are closer together geographically. Larger MATs with geographically clustered schools have the greatest amount of internal school-to-school staff movement.

A large, closely-clustered MAT structure may also enable more informal forms of cross-school staff sharing, such as staff cover and teachers teaching in more than one school, which our analysis cannot capture the extent of. More research is needed to investigate the extent of more informal staff sharing in MATs. Large, closely-clustered MATs may also enable more school-to-school collaboration among staff based in different schools.

## MATs seem able to move teachers to where they are most needed

Our analysis shows that when classroom teachers and senior leaders move to a school in the same MAT they are more likely to move to a school with a more disadvantaged intake than a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This is in contrast to teachers more generally, who are more likely to move to a school with a less disadvantaged intake. Allen *et al.*, (2016) find that schools with more disadvantaged intakes face greater difficulties in hiring staff.

The Government put the aim of "improving recruitment and retention of new and experienced teachers in areas of greatest need" at the heart of its 2016 White Paper (DfE, 2016b), although one of the main policies to support this aim, the National Teacher Service, was not successful (Hazell, 2016). Our evidence suggests that the strategic approach that MAT leaders can take towards workforce management might provide an effective mechanism for deploying staff to schools that struggle more with staff recruitment and retention. However, there are likely to be limits to this as a mechanism. Geographical dispersion influences how much movement there is between schools within MATs, so schools in isolated areas may find it more difficult to benefit from being part of a MAT in terms of staff redeployment.

# Staff redeployment in multi-academy trusts

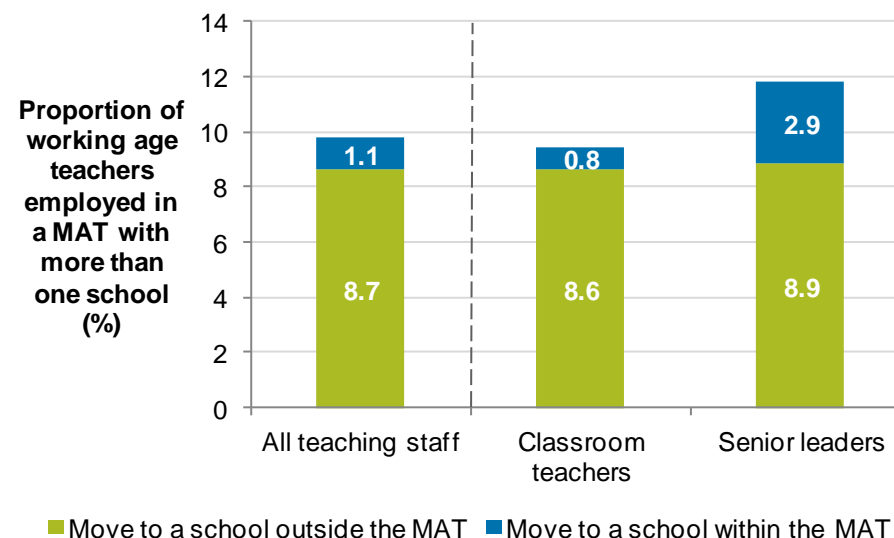
MATs are an important and growing feature of the school landscape in England. MATs are single organisational structures that have overarching responsibility for running a number of schools. The number of MATs has grown to 1,031 in September 2016. The size of the largest MATs has also grown: there are 28 trusts with more than 15 schools as of September 2016 (Hillary *et al.*, 2016). Legally, MATs employ all staff in the schools within the trust. Therefore, in theory, the MAT structure enables leaders to take a more strategic and flexible approach to staff deployment than if the schools were grouped in a looser model of school-to-school collaboration. It gives leaders the opportunity to deploy staff to where they are most needed in the trust.

However, exactly how much influence leaders can realistically have on how staff are deployed will depend on the balance between centralisation and delegation within each MAT, as well as the willingness of headteachers to allow staff to be deployed to different parts of the trust and the willingness of teachers themselves to be deployed elsewhere. Evidence from a Reform survey of MAT chief executives showed that while most MATs manage staff terms and conditions centrally, recruitment is delegated to individual schools within most MATs (Finch *et al.*, 2016). The survey also found that most forms of deploying staff between schools, such as permanent moves, secondments and staff cover, are commonly offered ‘sometimes’.

## Evidence from the School Workforce Census

What can data from the School Workforce Census (SWC) tell us about the extent of staff deployment across different schools in MATs? We analyse the movement of teachers between different schools from one year to the next using six years of SWC data (see box). Our analysis shows that around one per cent of teaching staff working in a MAT move to another school in the same MAT each year, compared to around nine per cent per year moving to another school outside the MAT. This rises to three per cent of MAT staff who move into and between senior leadership posts, nine per cent of whom per year move to a senior leadership role in another school outside the MAT.

This indicates that staff deployment across MATs is concentrated among senior leaders, consistent with the Department for Education’s good practice guidance for MATs, which recommends that MATs “grow and develop the next middle and senior leaders by deploying them across a group of schools,



Source: NFER analysis of School Workforce Census data

with the expectation of movement between schools within the trust” (DfE, 2016a). Classroom teachers tend to move less within a MAT than senior leaders, but may be deployed in more flexible ways that cannot be captured by our analysis. Teacher churn by teachers in MATs (around ten per cent) is higher than the average for all schools, which is around seven per cent for both classroom teachers and senior leaders.

Using 2010-2015 School Workforce Census data, we identify teachers who move from one school in a MAT to another school in the same MAT, as distinct from those who move to another school in a different MAT or to a school that is not in a MAT. This analysis captures permanent moves and secondments from one school to another but, as the SWC is an annual snapshot, it cannot capture more informal between-school deployments of staff, such as staff cover, short-term loans or teaching in more than one school (each teacher record has information on their main contract in each year, which is based at a single school). We define classroom teachers and senior leaders based on the post they move into i.e., senior leaders are those who move into a senior leadership post (headteachers, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers), whether or not they were a senior leader in the post they left.

# The level of within-MAT staff movement is relatively high

Schools within the same MAT tend to be clustered relatively close together geographically and most teachers that move school tend to move to a local school (DfE, 2017). We might therefore expect some movement between schools in the same MAT simply because they are close to each other. Is the amount of staff movement within MATs that we find in our analysis higher than we might expect based on geography alone?

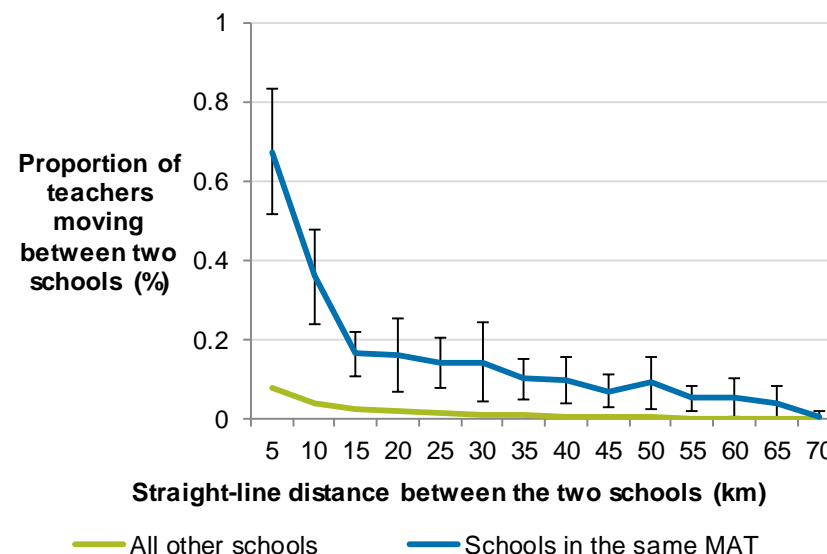
We check this by considering the extent of teacher movement between each secondary school in the country and all other secondary schools within a 70 kilometre radius<sup>1</sup>. Unsurprisingly, we found that the extent of staff movement between any two schools is higher when they are closer together. If we pick two schools within five kilometres of each other at random then the probability of a teacher moving from one to the other is one in 1200. If the two schools are five to ten kilometres apart, then the probability is lower: one in 2400. This is shown by the green line in the figure opposite, which slopes downwards as the distance between schools increases.

However, if the two schools are in the same MAT and less than five kilometres apart then the probability is one in 150: around nine times higher than schools that are not in the same MAT. In general, the amount of staff movement between two schools within the same MAT is more than ten times higher than the level we might expect based purely on how far apart the schools are (blue line). This is important because it suggests that MATs have internal teacher labour markets that are somewhat distinct from surrounding schools.

## What is causing greater staff movement within MATs?

There are several possible explanations for this pattern, which could each contribute to explaining the findings. MAT leaders may take an active role in deploying staff to different schools within the MAT. Being responsible for a number of schools, they are better incentivised to take a strategic approach to deployment that sees staff moved to where they are most needed. This is likely to be particularly the case where a high-performing school supports an underperforming school: the Department for Education's good practice guide recommends that MATs consider "how they deploy the capacity within their trust to work with the schools' teachers and leaders to improve practice" (DfE, 2016a). Capacity-sharing in this context might well include a secondment or

<sup>1</sup> We only conducted this analysis for secondary schools.



Source: NFER analysis of School Workforce Census data  
Note: the black bars indicate 95 per cent confidence intervals

permanent move. MAT leaders might also be keen to use the range of opportunities that exist across their MAT to develop the leadership pipeline from within. Former Education Secretary Nicky Morgan suggested that a model of flexible staff deployment would "give a clear path to career progression that will keep [teachers and leaders] engaged rather than looking for opportunities elsewhere" (Morgan, 2016). We will be undertaking further research over the next few months to explore this more complex question: does a flexible model of staff deployment in a MAT help to improve teacher retention? Or could re-deployment potentially be disengaging?

Information about vacancies within a MAT is likely to be more easily available to staff within a MAT than to staff outside the MAT. A greater level of standardisation and consistency of approach (for example, in curriculum) may exist between schools in the same MAT, enabling a smoother transition if teachers move school. Teachers may also be familiar with the staff in other schools through school-to-school collaboration, such as curriculum planning or moderation. Part of the pattern may also be explained by the characteristics of teachers and schools within MATs that are associated with greater movement, e.g. young teachers, schools in urban areas.



# MAT size and dispersion both influence staff movement

## Teacher movement is greater within larger MATs

The average proportion of all MAT staff that move to a different school in the same MAT is greater where the number of schools in the MAT is larger. This is intuitive, as more schools means there are more opportunities for staff to move. The chart below shows this is the case for classroom teachers and senior leaders.

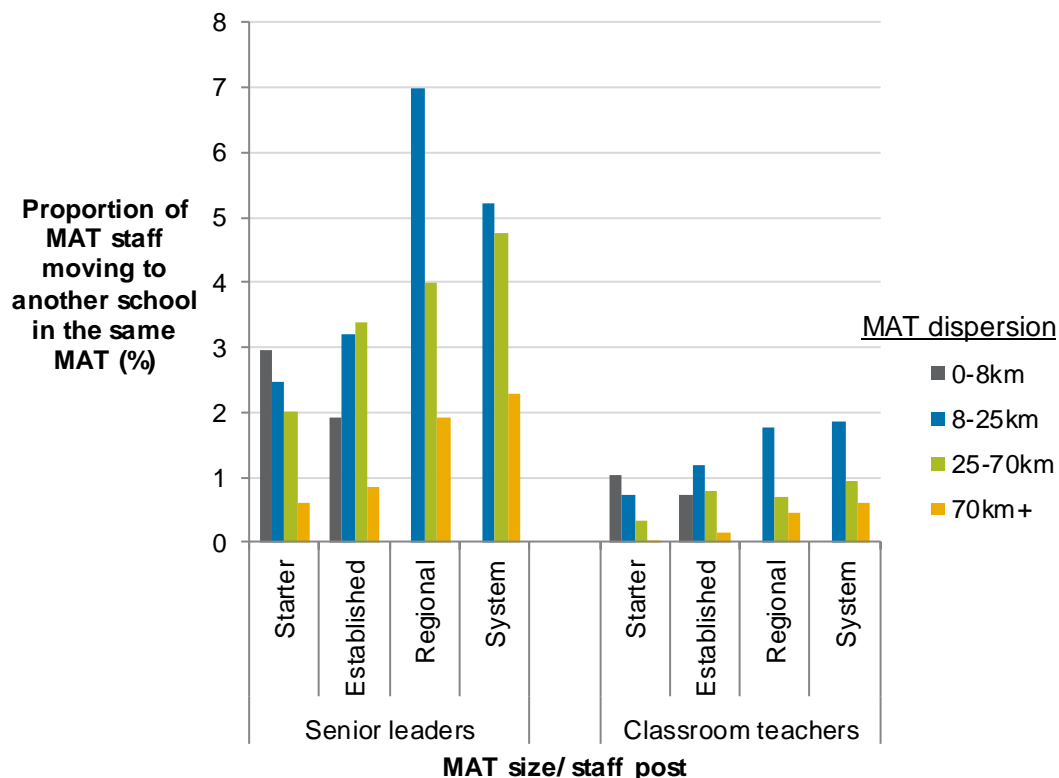
## Staff movement is lower in MATs that are more dispersed

Size matters, but distance matters too – and it probably matters more. For MATs of a given size, the proportion of staff that move to a different school in the same MAT is less where the schools are geographically further apart. Again, this is intuitive as most teachers move to a local school when they move.

## Large MATs clustered together have the most staff movement

Larger MATs with geographically clustered schools have the greatest amount of internal school-to-school staff movement. The House of Commons Education Committee (GB, 2017) have argued that “regional structures which allow schools to share expertise and resources” are one of the characteristics of the most successful trusts, while DfE have emphasised the importance of “coherent geographical clusters” within MATs, which “can be created in national or regional trusts by creating smaller clusters within them” (DfE, 2016a).

A large, closely-clustered MAT structure might also enable more informal forms of cross-school staff sharing, such as staff cover and teachers teaching in more than one school. However, our analysis of the School Workforce Census can only capture the extent of permanent moves and secondments between different schools. Further research is needed to investigate the extent of informal staff-sharing in MATs. Large, closely-clustered MATs may also enable more school-to-school collaboration among staff permanently based in different schools.



## Definitions

### MAT size

Sir David Carter, the National Schools Commissioner, developed a four-tier system for classifying trusts according to their size:

**Starter trusts:** MATs with up to five academies in the same region

**Established trusts:** MATs with between six and 15 academies in the same region

**Regional trusts:** MATs with between 16 and 30 academies, which operate across regions

**System trusts:** MATs with over 30 academies which may be located across the country.

Our definition uses the same labels, but is based only on the number of schools in the MAT.

### MAT dispersion

We define dispersion by the average straight-line distance between the grid reference of each school and the centre point (median grid reference) of all schools in the MAT.

Source: NFER analysis of School Workforce Census data

# Multi-academy trusts can be a mechanism for getting teachers to where they are most needed

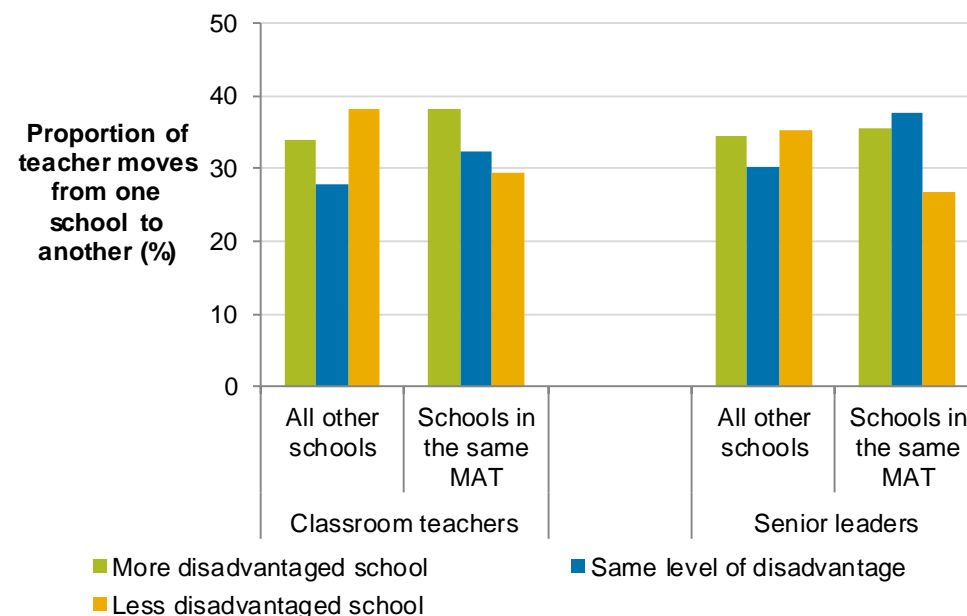
A common concern among policymakers is how to get high quality teachers into schools or areas of the country that are underperforming, which also tend to be where schools find it hardest to recruit and retain teachers. The Government put this issue at the heart of its 2016 White Paper, stating that “Educational excellence everywhere means improving recruitment and retention of new and experienced teachers in areas of greatest need” (DfE, 2016b). However, one of the main policies for overcoming regional staff deployment issues, the National Teacher Service, failed to recruit enough teachers (Hazell, 2016).

Given the flexibility and strategic oversight that MAT leaders have over staff deployment across their schools, MATs may offer an alternative and potentially effective mechanism for deploying staff to schools in challenging areas that struggle to recruit and retain staff. Our analysis has shown that MATs have internal teacher labour markets that are somewhat distinct from surrounding schools. But do the internal labour markets within MATs promote staff deployment that is beneficial to the system?

Allen *et al.*, (2016) find that schools with the most disadvantaged pupil intakes tend to have more inexperienced teachers, more unqualified teachers and higher staff turnover, suggesting that these schools face greater difficulties in hiring staff. We analyse how teacher movement affects schools with different levels of intake disadvantage by comparing the FSM quintiles<sup>2</sup> of the school a teacher left to the one the teacher joined. We split the analysis by classroom teachers and senior leaders, and by within-MAT moves and all other moves, to explore how MATs influence between-school movement.

Our analysis shows that, in general, when classroom teachers move school, a greater proportion move to a school with a less disadvantaged intake (yellow bars) than a school with a more disadvantaged intake (green bars). Movement is more balanced among all senior leaders, but is still slightly in favour of schools with less disadvantaged intakes. In contrast, when classroom teachers and senior leaders move from a school in a MAT to another school in the same MAT they are more likely to move to a school with a more disadvantaged

<sup>2</sup> Five equally-sized groups of schools, split according to the proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals, from the highest to the lowest.



Source: NFER analysis of School Workforce Census data  
 Note: ‘All other schools’ includes all teacher moves that are in and out of maintained schools, and academies in single-academy trusts and MATs.

intake than a school with a less disadvantaged intake. This suggests that the strategic approach that MATs can take towards workforce management might provide a mechanism for deploying staff to schools with more disadvantaged pupil intakes.

However, there are likely to be limits to this as a mechanism. The proportion of teachers moving within a MAT to a school with a less disadvantaged intake is still relatively high: 30 per cent for classroom teachers and 27 per cent for senior leaders. Although MAT leadership teams may be able to influence staff deployment to some degree, movement requires the willingness of teachers and school heads. Also, as we have noted above, the geographical dispersion of the MAT influences how much movement there is between schools within a MAT. Schools with disadvantaged intakes that are in isolated areas may find it more difficult to benefit from being part of a MAT in terms of staff deployment.

# What next for this research?

## Diagnostic analysis of teacher retention and turnover patterns on the workforce

This research project aims to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics within the teacher workforce in England. The study will inform policy makers and system leaders to help formulate effective responses to this complex issue and meet the challenge of increasing demand for teachers. The research project will be in two stages, which will each explore different aspects of the teacher labour market.

### Teacher workforce dynamics in the school sector

In the first stage of the project we will use data from the School Workforce Census to determine the key factors associated with a teacher leaving the profession, moving within the sector and returning to the profession in England. An interim report will be published in late summer 2017.

### Teacher labour market behaviour and comparisons with other professions

In the second stage of the project we will undertake new statistical analysis using data from the Understanding Society survey to understand the external and personal factors that are associated with teacher labour market behaviour. Using data analysis and stakeholder interviews, we will draw comparisons between teaching and other public sector professions, particularly nursing and policing. We will disseminate our findings from the second stage through further Research Updates in autumn 2017 and a final report will be published in spring 2018.

Find out more about this project and sign up to receive reports when they are available at:  
[www.nfer.ac.uk/research/teaching-workforce-dynamics/](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research/teaching-workforce-dynamics/)

This project is being funded by the Nuffield Foundation, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

# Appendix

The analysis in this report analyses the average proportion of between-school staff movements over the 2010-2015 period, using six waves of the School Workforce Census (SWC). The analysis focuses on movements within MATs, which have grown in number and in size over the period. Table A1 shows that the number of teaching staff in MATs during the period we analyse has grown rapidly. This rapid growth is due to the number of schools that have become academies and joined multi-academy trusts since 2010.

**Table A1** Number of teachers employed by MATs by year

Year	Number of MAT teachers
2010	13,686
2011	31,475
2012	49,674
2013	68,628
2014	86,536
2015	92,095

The analysis on pages 4 and 6 is restricted to MATs with more than one school. The analysis is split by MAT size, MAT dispersion and also by teachers and senior leaders. Table A2 below shows the number of potential staff moves and actual staff moves (in parentheses) in terms of teachers per year that our analysis is based on. The analysis combines data from primary and secondary schools.

**Table A2** Sample sizes by MAT and teacher characteristics

Staff type	MAT size	0-8km	8-25km	25-70km	70km+
Classroom teachers	Starter	70,159 (727)	14,134 (102)	4,754 (16)	2,477 (1)
	Established	8,991 (65)	7,995 (96)	7,754 (62)	6,006 (9)
	Regional		1,754 (31)	6,064 (42)	12,053 (57)
	System		1,071 (20)	5,924 (57)	12,700 (78)
Senior leaders	Starter	10,868 (323)	2,234 (55)	695 (14)	326 (2)
	Established	1,464 (28)	1,313 (42)	1,296 (44)	944 (8)
	Regional		315 (22)	873 (35)	1,402 (27)
	System		230 (12)	948 (45)	1,823 (42)

**Total teacher-years analysed = 186,567 (2,062 moves).**

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