Trying to connect – emerging findings

Education staff wellbeing and workload during the Covid lockdown, volume 1

June 2020

schoolzone

Durham
University
Evidence Centre for Education

Contents

Introduction

Trying to connect is what teachers have been doing for 10 weeks, during school and college closures. They tend to enter the profession because they enjoy working with children and young people but for the last 10 weeks they have been having to do something entirely different, with, understandably, too little warning, preparation and, sometimes guidance. Even if they can connect digitally, many find this a rather (or very) unsatisfying way of connecting with their students.

The pace of events was so fast that institutions and practitioners simply weren't prepared – even if the technology was in place, a minority were trained or familiar with the use of tools that have been designed for remote teaching. Some teachers didn't know which systems to use, how to use them or even if they were allowed to, for safeguarding reasons. The majority seem to have fallen back largely on the use of tools they were using before, such as email, which has taken up a lot of time and generated a great deal of stress and anxiety.

This study generated a large response from teachers and lecturers – over 3,000 responded overnight – and there was a considerable outpouring of emotion. Some respondents were just glad to be asked how they were coping and most took the opportunity to express emotions, often keenly felt. This report should be read in that context. Although it's a reasonable representation by school type, region etc, it may not be the whole spread of response,

This term may have seen the biggest test of the use of distance learning for mass education we will ever have and it's a shame we weren't better prepared for it, to give it a fair trial. For some teachers, this experience will put them off; for others, technology will become more embedded in their teaching practice.

Undoubtedly though, based on these findings, far from teachers being on extended holiday (as some fear the public perceive it), they have experienced hugely increased workloads through trying to keep learning going in these incredibly difficult circumstances. A lot of time is being spent in admin (emailing students, parents and colleagues for example) and in preparing work for students and in marking it.

Primary teachers seem to have been hit harder than secondary and tertiary teachers, working more hours and feeling more stressed. Teachers with school age children have also suffered a double whammy of having to teach (and of course, simply look after) their own children, while schools are closed as well as teaching pupils and students.
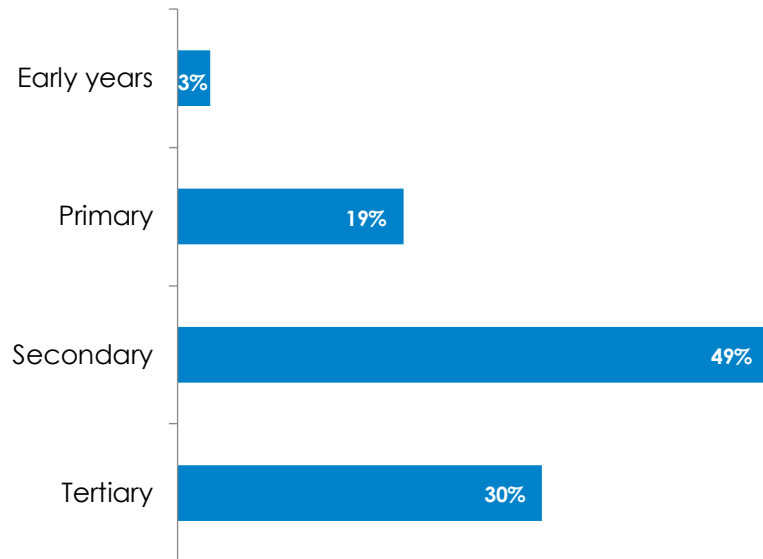
Our intention is to monitor levels of wellbeing throughout the closures and gradual re-opening of educational institutions and to see what practical steps are being taken along the way. Further reports will look at this data in more detail.
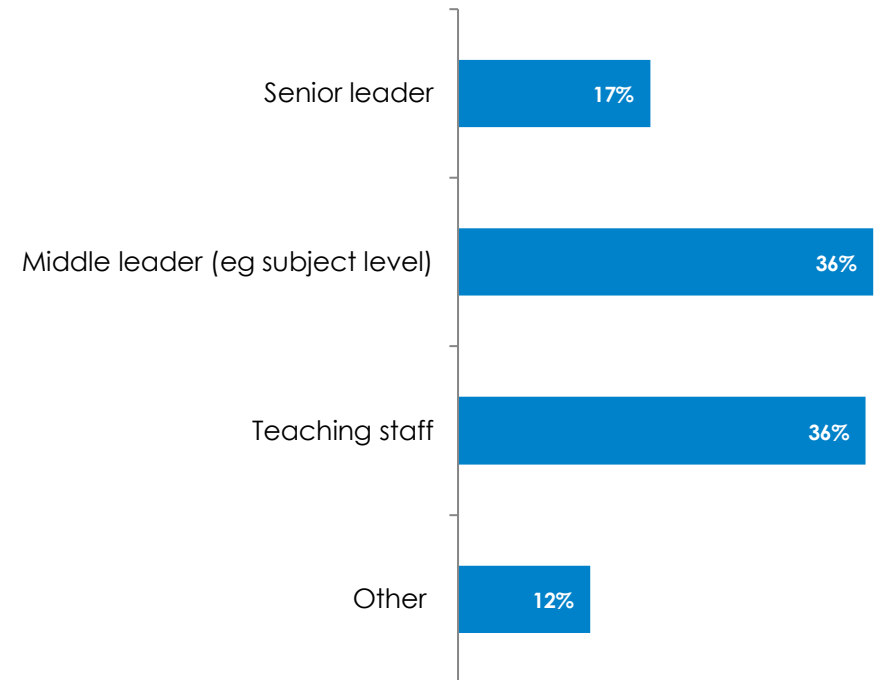
Methodology

Respondents

Schoolzone's panel of teachers in education were emailed an invitation to take part in an online survey. The email was sent just once and received over three thousand responses.

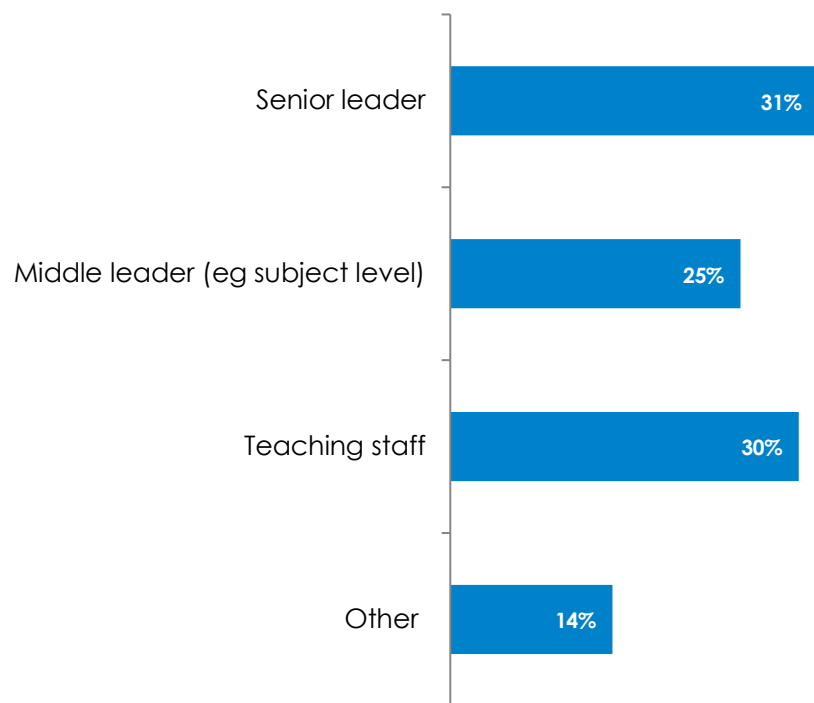Respondents occupied a number of different roles in their place of work – the spread being skewed towards more senior roles, especially at primary.

Would you describe your role as: (n=3377)

Please tell us which phase of education you primarily work in (n=3401)

Early years — 3%
Primary — 19%
Secondary — 49%
Tertiary — 30%

Senior leader — 17%
Middle leader (eg subject level) — 36%
Teaching staff — 36%
Other — 12%

Would you describe your role as: (Early years and primary n=721)

Survey

Questions were designed by Durham University and Schoolzone, who also built the survey, which was branched, presenting some different questions based on phase in which respondents work.

Schoolzone cleaned and analysed the data charted in this report.

All data was cross-tabbed by phase and role and where there are any significant differences, these are included in this report. Chi squared analysis was applied to cross tab data and only those showing independence are used.

A note on potential bias

There was no incentive in this survey and it may be that responses were biased towards those who were using the survey to express their dissatisfaction as a result of the Covid lockdown, so the findings should be seen in that context. For that reason, we haven't tried to categorise open-text responses and have instead published them all verbatim here.

Wellbeing measures are used a baseline in this report, with a view to seeing how they change over time.

Workload

During school closures, teachers are mostly engaged in **administrative activities**, typically spending (a mean of) **13 hours per week** on this, though with a wide range of times demonstrated among respondents (SD 10 hours). **Planning and preparation** are also taking up a large proportion of teachers' time with a mean of **11.5 hours per week** (SD 10 hours).

60% of teachers are spending less than 5 hours a week teaching – by whatever methods are available to them – see below for a consideration of online delivery methods: it's easy to see why there is so little direct teaching going on.

There is a small variation between primary and secondary teachers, with **secondary** teachers spending a mean of one hour **more in planning** and one hour **less on administrative** activities.

Of the 'other' activities which teachers spend time on, marking and assessment, CPD and meetings are the most commonly mentioned across all phases, while at HE, many are spending a lot of time engaged in research and writing reports.

As might be expected, senior leaders spend more time on managerial activities, with 17.6 hours per week as the mean (SD 12 hours) and on administrative activities – 16 hours per week (SD 11 hours). **Primary senior leaders** spend around two hours per week **more** than secondary leaders on each of these activities.

When asked how they were feeling during the last few weeks, teachers revealed a wide range of responses in regard to workload, but the vast majority of them were negative, talking about doubling of workload, 100 hour weeks, having to teach their own children at the same time and so on. Some had found the extra non-teaching time valuable and developed strategies for coping with isolation.

Teachers keenly feel the lack of interaction, both with staff and students, remote teaching seems to be a lonely experience: "it's like singing on a stage with a blindfold and ear muffs on and not knowing how empty or full the venue is," one teacher put it.

No-one was prepared for the sudden switch, of course, and some have coped better than others. There was little in the way of guidance for teachers, which seems to have been a cause of extensive stress: "whatever I am doing, I feel that I ought to be doing something else," as one put it.

A small selection of comments about workload:

"We are a family of all teachers! It's been really hard with an 18-month-old and trying to maintain our teaching at home. So, although we aren't at work, I feel we are working just as hard as we would be at school! We have had to create a timetable in order to get things done and now we are teaching live lessons (which I think are really important to be doing) it's got even harder to juggle. We find ourselves in a position where if nursery opens, even if we aren't back at home full time then we will need to send our daughter back in order to manage our workload. A hard decision."

"Trying to remote teach from a corner of the dining room is having a significant impact on me - work load is huge, and my family - who need my attention, but I can't always be available. Two children home educating, 5 people to feed twice a day - whilst trying to teach - on top of national concerns over the virus and family concerns over shielding / furlough & loss of income, the pressure is IMMENSE - thank God the sun is shining!"
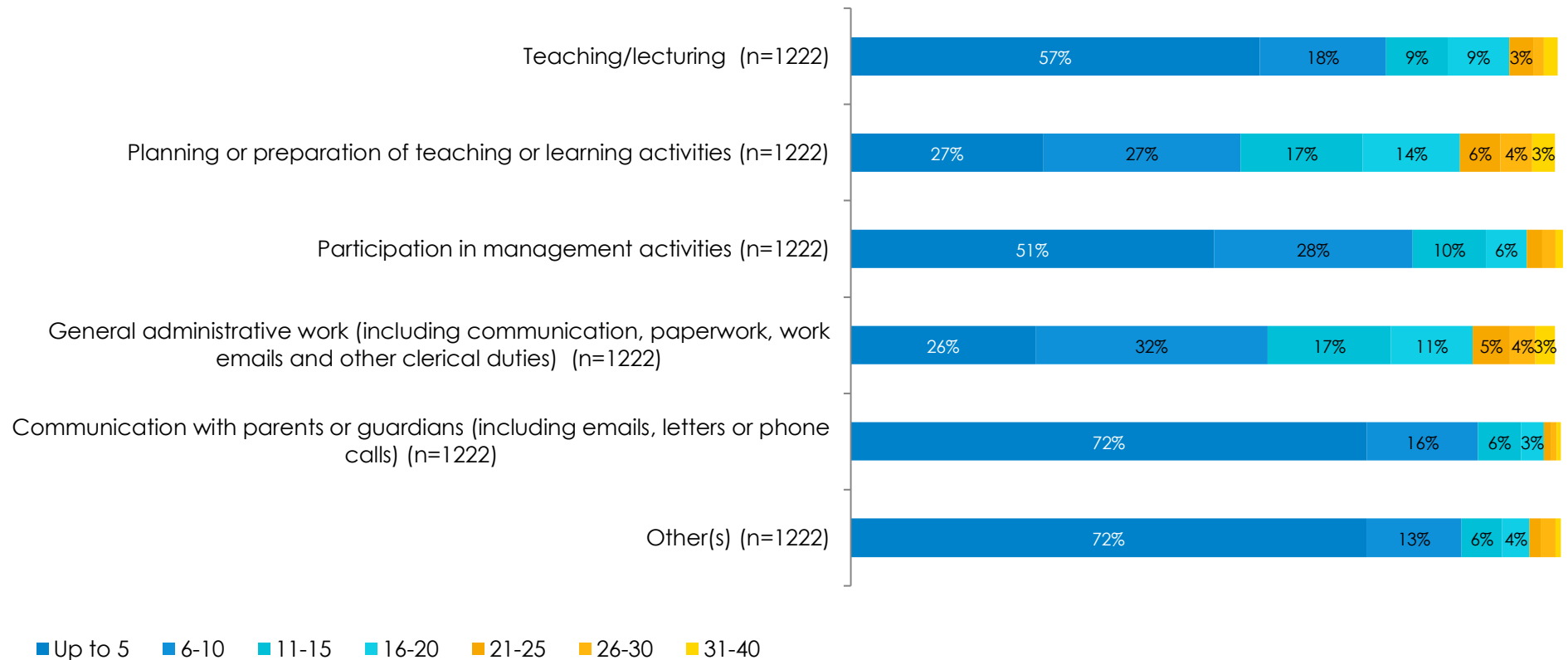
"Work-family balance with two young children very challenging. Trying to be full time teacher and educator....step children as mum who they normal reside with us a nurse....is stressful at times and difficult balance to juggle, feel over connected with colleagues and pupils via video and impacts on home life I.e worrying children are occupied and looked after properly when attention is split between calls that go on for over an hour and their well-being. Work says focus on you but then the expectation is still there to focus on work. Also, with personal feelings about general situation with Covid feels like you need to support parents emotionally when you may not have that emotional support yourself."

"Work is 24/7 term-time and over holidays. Keeping up with teaching primary school children online is relentless. Parents email at all hours and expect a speedy response. It is going to be even more challenging still offering full-time education online while teaching those who return to school."

"Work was always very hard and time consuming with long hours but remote learning has been a real struggle with brand new set of skills needed involving ICT usage without proper guidance eg zoom , google drive, Microsoft meeting, etc etc ... students also emailing work directly via email and feedback response required same day . This is on top of regular day to day emails such as staff updates on strategies and Professional development courses via email weekly. We also have subject based tasks set too. Finding myself working harder than ever and more anxious as can't speak to anyone face to face in a professional manner."

In your most recent full working week, approximately how many hours did you spend on each of the following activities?

Activity	Up to 5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40
Teaching/lecturing (n=1222)	57%	18%	9%	9%			3%
Planning or preparation of teaching or learning activities (n=1222)	27%	27%	17%	14%	6%	4%	3%
Participation in management activities (n=1222)	51%	28%	10%	6%			
General administrative work (including communication, paperwork, work emails and other clerical duties) (n=1222)	26%	32%	17%	11%	5%	4%	3%
Communication with parents or guardians (including emails, letters or phone calls) (n=1222)	72%	16%	6%	3%			
Other(s) (n=1222)	72%	13%	6%	4%			

■ Up to 5 ■ 6-10 ■ 11-15 ■ 16-20 ■ 21-25 ■ 26-30 ■ 31-40

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Wellbeing

Most teachers have felt, in the last month, that **what they do is important and worthwhile**, with 46% more saying this have felt this often (scored 7-10) than those who felt it seldom (scored 0 – 3).

Similarly, 31% more said they often felt **happy and cheerful** in the last month, than those who had seldom felt this way.

However, **levels of optimism are rather lower**, with just 7% more saying they were optimistic and hopeful than those who seldom were.

The measure which **indicated lowest levels of wellbeing was feeling full of energy**, which scored a negative value: 2% less had often felt full of energy than had seldom felt it.

This indicates the toll that the last month has taken on teachers: they take pride in what they are doing, even though most of it is currently admin and prep, and feel quite happy, but they are wearied by the situation and worried about what comes next.

When asked to comment generally on how they have been feeling in the last month, the most commonly expressed emotions were anxiety and anger. Full list here.

In the last month since the lockdown, how often have you had the following feelings or thoughts?

Legend: Never, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, All the time

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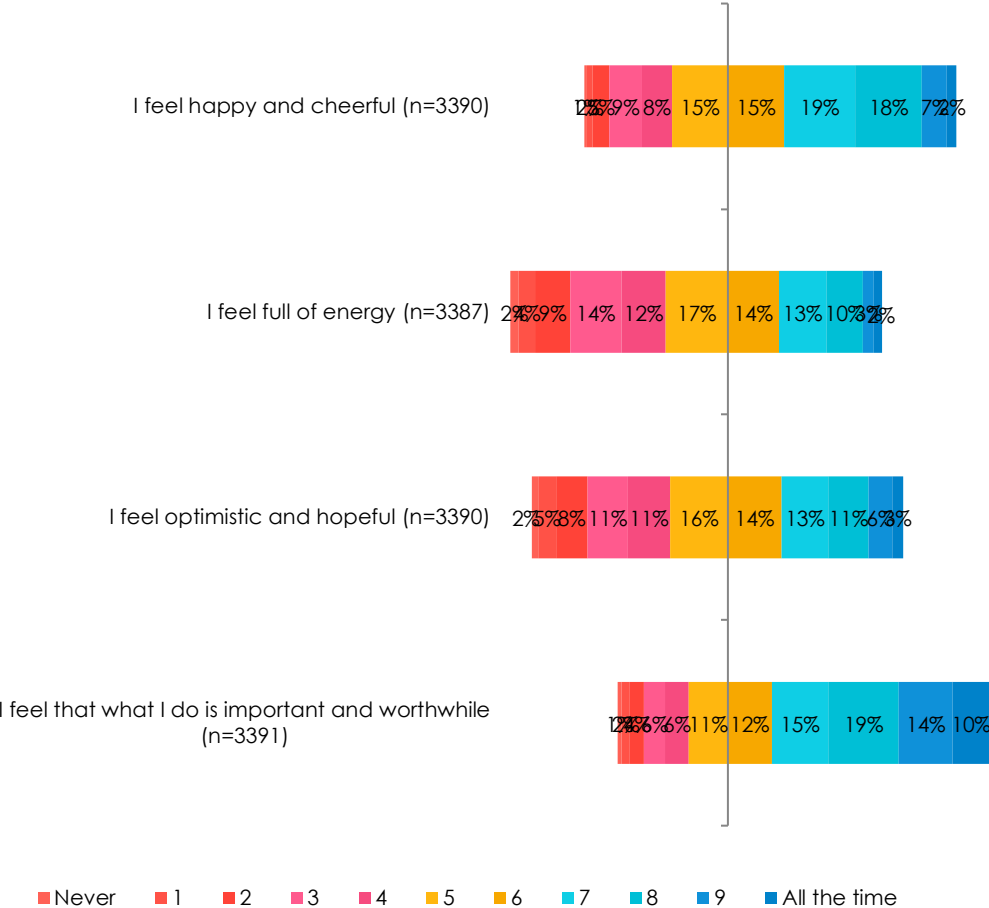
The wellbeing scales should really be taken as a baseline measure for subsequent phases of this research. The intention is to track wellbeing during school closure and partial re-opening. Here we are looking for differences between phases and job role at a rather superficial level – a more rigorous approach will be used for the longitudinal study. At the time of this research, primary schools were about to re-open to some year groups so teachers in this phase may have been adversely affected by this.

Variations between phases of education

Respondents working at **tertiary level have less often felt that what they do is important and worthwhile**, with just 38% scoring this positively on balance, compared to 47% at primary and 50% secondary.

However, they report feeling happy and cheerful at a similar rate to primary respondents (23-24%), **while secondary respondents seem to have been more happy and cheerful** in the last month, at 39%.

Secondary respondents are also feeling more full of energy, with the balance lying at a (still low) 6% feeling it more often

than seldom, while primary (-12%) and tertiary (-9%) feel this more seldom.

Secondary respondents are also more optimistic, with 14% more, on balance, feeling so, while primary (2%) and tertiary (-2%) are more evenly split.

Variation by job role

Job role seems to have little impact on wellbeing, though **middle leaders are a little calmer**, with 11% on balance saying they have felt calm and relaxed this month, while SLT and teachers score -2%.

On the other hand, middle leaders are also less optimistic and hopeful and tend to feel less engaged and involved in what they do.

However, it's worth noting that a smaller proportion of primary respondents (25%) considered themselves to be 'middle leaders', compared to secondary (44%) and tertiary (32%) respondents and this may have skewed this result. See forthcoming report for full statistical treatment.

Use of edtech

Online teaching

Teachers came to the current situation with **very little experience in online teaching**: 60% had little or none.

Only a quarter of respondents feel confident to any extent in using edtech to deliver lessons online.

43% of teachers find online teaching stressful and only a tiny proportion say they have better interactions with their students online.

A third of teachers feel adequately resourced for online teaching, but a similar proportion say they would not use online teaching if they could help it.

It seems unlikely that, with so little preparation and such low levels of confidence that online teaching was ever going to be widespread during such a sudden pattern of events that led to school closures.
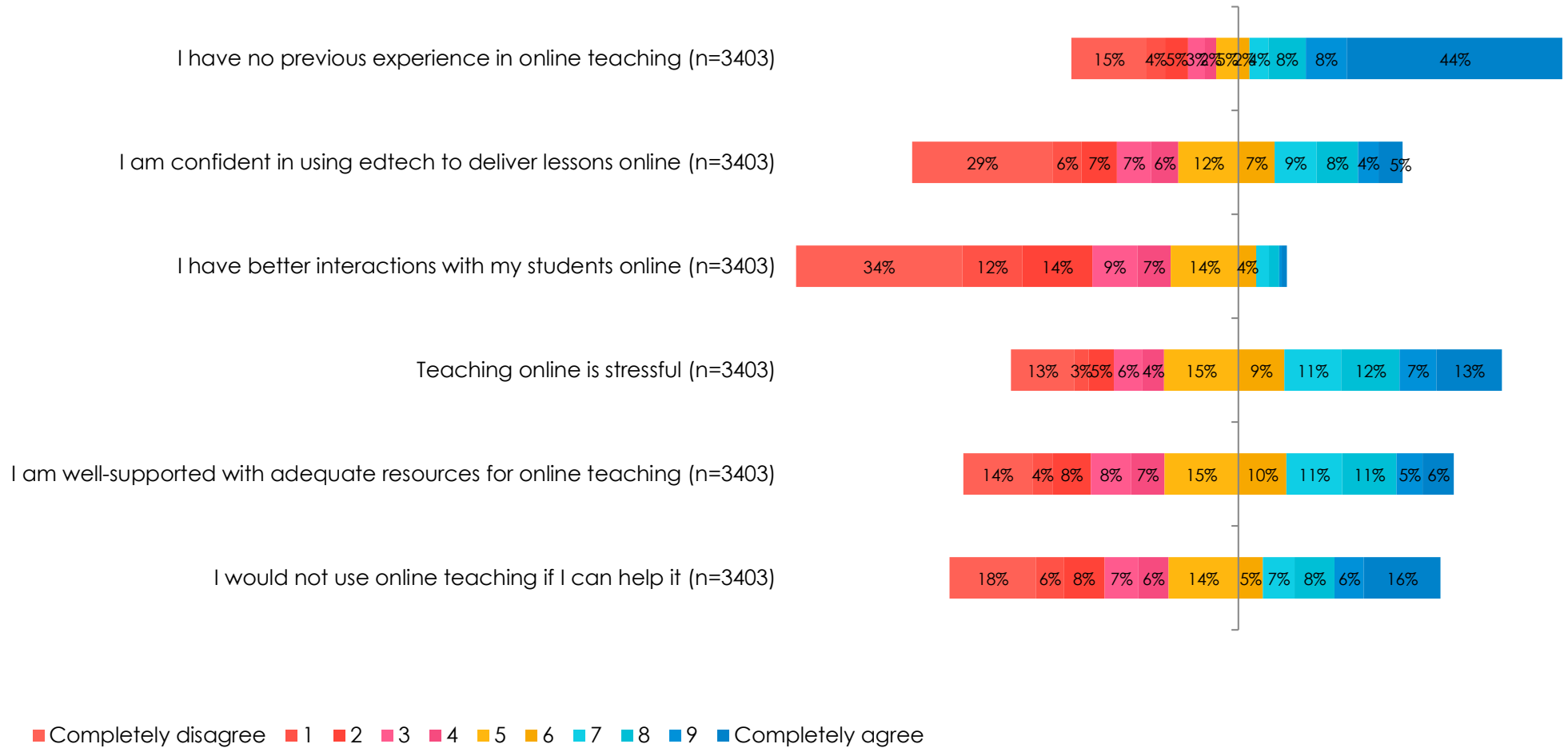
In comments, teachers often had problems connecting with students: many students, especially those from more deprived backgrounds lacked access and even when this wasn't an issue, teachers tend to find the remoteness unsatisfying or challenging.

Variation by phase of education

Teachers in **tertiary education have rather more experience in online teaching** – only 50% had little or none, compared to 70% at primary and secondary.

Primary teachers are rather less confident in using edtech to deliver lessons online - fewer than one in five say they are.

While primary teachers don't feel that online teaching is any more or less stressful than those working in other phases, they are even less likely to say that they have better interactions with their students online, perhaps unsurprisingly.

	Completely disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Completely agree

I have no previous experience in online teaching (n=3403): 15% 4% 5% 3% 2% 2% 2% 4% 8% 8% 44%

I am confident in using edtech to deliver lessons online (n=3403): 29% 6% 7% 7% 6% 12% 7% 9% 8% 4% 5%

I have better interactions with my students online (n=3403): 34% 12% 14% 9% 7% 14% 4%

Teaching online is stressful (n=3403): 13% 3% 5% 6% 4% 15% 9% 11% 12% 7% 13%

I am well-supported with adequate resources for online teaching (n=3403): 14% 4% 8% 8% 7% 15% 10% 11% 11% 5% 6%

I would not use online teaching if I can help it (n=3403): 18% 6% 8% 7% 6% 14% 5% 7% 8% 6% 16%

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How often do you use the following for communication with your students?

Legend: 0 (Never) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 (Very frequently)

Category	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Email (n=3381)	18%	3%	3%	3%	3%	7%	4%	7%	11%	8%	32%
Class blog (n=3381)	75%	4%	4%	3%							4%
School website (n=3381)	60%	6%	5%	3%	3%	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%	8%
Skype/Zoom/Facetime etc (n=3381)	54%	4%	4%	3%	2%	5%	3%	4%	5%	3%	10%
Chat rooms/forum (n=3381)	77%	5%	3%	2%							3%
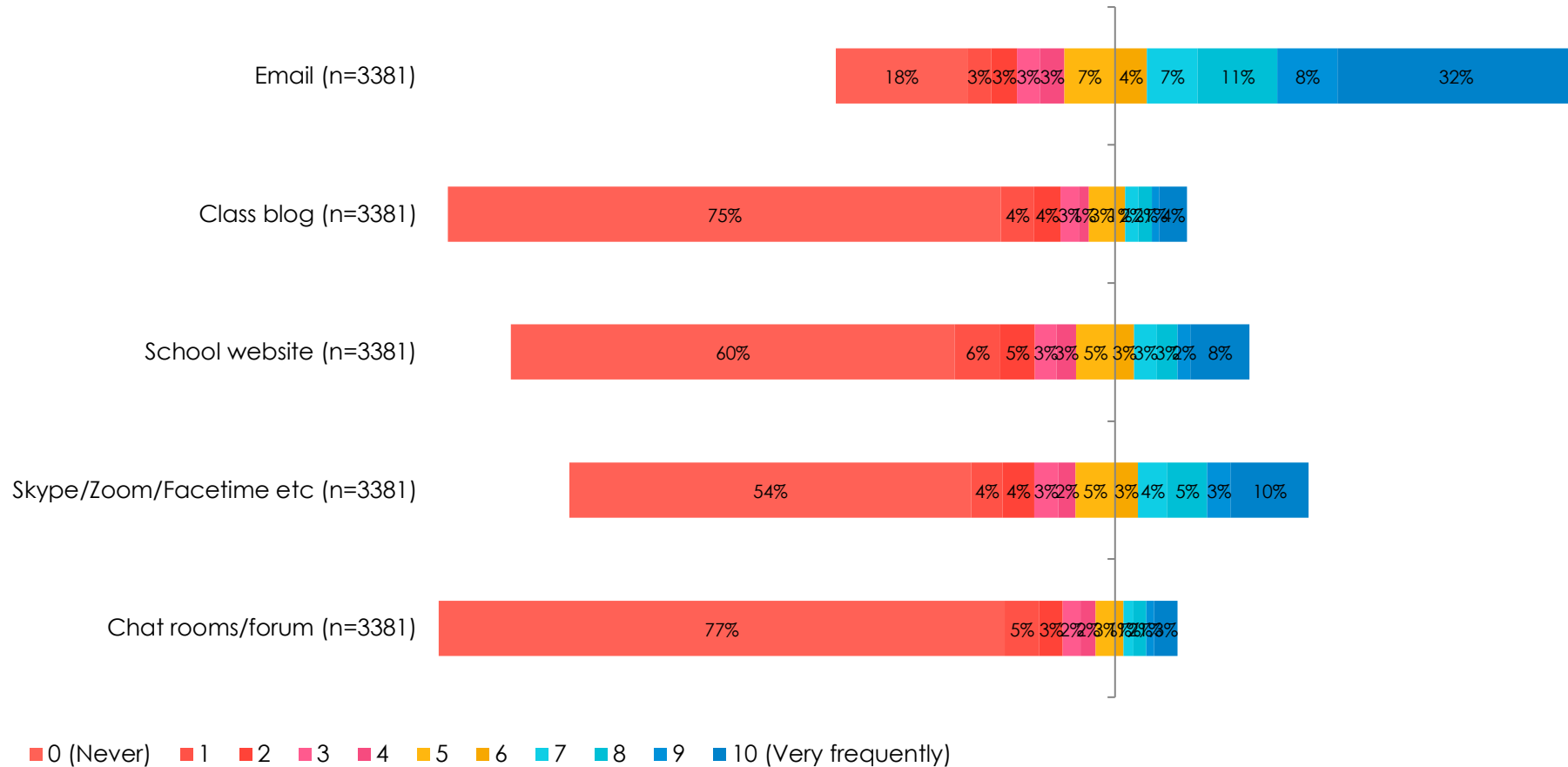
Variation by role

Senior leaders have more experience than other roles in online teaching – this may be a function of number of years in the profession.

While this doesn't make senior leaders any more confident in delivering online lessons, they do find it **less stressful**: only 5% on balance found it so, compared to c.30% of other roles.

Senior leaders are also less likely to rule out online teaching if they could help it.

Communication with students

Across all phases, the medium used for communication with learners is dominated by **email**.

At **primary** level, the use of all methods of all communication is lower, though email is still the main means. Almost as widely used though are **school websites**.

The use of **Skype, Zoom and Facetime etc** is confined largely to **tertiary**, where there is less concern about safeguarding issues.

In comments, teachers expressed concern about students who had home environments that were less supportive than ideal or where access to hardware or internet were barriers, but they also found communication generally to be difficult and demanding. With so much being done by email or transfer of documents, workloads are high.

END

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Respondent school profiling

School type

The proportion of each school type in England represented by the data is (compared to gov.uk data):

	Sample %	National %
Academy 16-19 converter	0.3%	0.1%
Academy converter	46.3%	25.6%
Academy special converter	0.5%	1.2%
Community school	17.4%	29.7%
Foundation school	4.7%	3.4%
Free schools	2.2%	1.8%
Further education	2.0%	1.2%
Independent	13.3%	12.4%
Local authority nursery school	0.4%	1.8%
Non-maintained special school	1.9%	0.3%
Pupil referral unit	0.5%	1.0%
University technical college	0.7%	0.2%
Voluntary aided school	7.0%	13.5%
Voluntary controlled school	2.7%	8.1%

Geographical spread

The proportion of schools (inc academies) situated in each LA represented by the data is:

Barking and Dagenham	9%
Barnet	14%
Barnsley	2%
Bath and North East Somerset	14%
Bedford	15%
Bexley	20%
Birmingham	13%
Blackburn with Darwen	5%

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Blackpool	4%	Cheshire West and Chester	11%
Bolton	9%	City of London	20%
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	9%	Cornwall	10%
Bracknell Forest	22%	Coventry	10%
Bradford	5%	Croydon	19%
Brent	24%	Cumbria	6%
Brighton and Hove	46%	Darlington	13%
Bristol City of	28%	Derby	10%
Bromley	20%	Derbyshire	6%
Buckinghamshire	20%	Devon	10%
Bury	8%	Doncaster	2%
Calderdale	10%	Dorset	12%
Cambridgeshire	9%	Dudley	4%
Camden	25%	Durham	2%
Central Bedfordshire	11%	Ealing	5%
Cheshire East	10%	East Riding of Yorkshire	5%

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East Sussex	24%	Hillingdon	10%
Enfield	10%	Hounslow	11%
Essex	13%	Isle of Wight	9%
Gateshead	5%	Islington	9%
Gloucestershire	14%	Kensington and Chelsea	13%
Greenwich	9%	Kent	17%
Hackney	3%	Kingston upon Hull City of	29%
Halton	1%	Kingston upon Thames	17%
Hammersmith and Fulham	66%	Kirklees	7%
Hampshire	10%	Lambeth	15%
Haringey	12%	Lancashire	7%
Harrow	12%	Leeds	36%
Hartlepool	7%	Leicester	7%
Havering	5%	Leicestershire	12%
Herefordshire	11%	Lewisham	24%
Hertfordshire	16%	Lincolnshire	7%

Liverpool	41%	North Yorkshire	6%
Luton	16%	Northamptonshire	11%
Manchester	29%	Northumberland	6%
Medway	3%	Nottingham	11%
Merton	8%	Nottinghamshire	6%
Middlesbrough	8%	Oldham	8%
Milton Keynes	15%	Oxfordshire	25%
Monmouthshire	7%	Pembrokeshire	8%
Newcastle upon Tyne	43%	Peterborough	6%
Newham	15%	Plymouth	13%
Newport	5%	Portsmouth	27%
Norfolk	5%	Reading	17%
North East Lincolnshire	5%	Redbridge	5%
North Lincolnshire	5%	Redcar and Cleveland	43%
North Somerset	13%	Richmond upon Thames	27%
North Tyneside	6%	Rochdale	7%

Rutland	18%	Suffolk	11%
Sefton	4%	Sunderland	4%
Sheffield	28%	Surrey	26%
Shropshire	2%	Sutton	29%
Slough	28%	Swindon	21%
Solihull	10%	Tameside	6%
Somerset	3%	Telford and Wrekin	8%
South Gloucestershire	5%	Thurrock	15%
South Tyneside	6%	Torbay	26%
Southampton	26%	Tower Hamlets	7%
Southwark	18%	Trafford	6%
St. Helens	3%	Wakefield	5%
Staffordshire	8%	Walsall	6%
Stockport	11%	Waltham Forest	11%
Stockton-on-Tees	9%	Wandsworth	21%
Stoke-on-Trent	26%	Warrington	5%

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Warwickshire	13%
West Berkshire	6%
West Sussex	21%
Westminster	17%
Wigan	4%
Wiltshire	10%
Windsor and Maidenhead	21%
Wirral	9%
Wokingham	19%
Wolverhampton	8%
Worcestershire	26%
Wrexham	34%
York	41%

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