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CHIEF REPORTER

DUBAI A survey of teachers has revealed that nearly eight out of 10 teachers working in the UAE are currently considering moving jobs, mainly because of low salaries.

The UAE Teacher Survey 2016, conducted among 531 teachers in January by WhichSchoolAdvisor.com, a dedicated guide for private schools and the UAE Learning Network, an online network of educators, showed that a whopping 76.92 per cent of respondents cited "an improvement in pay" as the top reason for staying in their teaching job after their contract expired.

Significantly, 70 per cent of the teachers worked in British, American and IB curriculum schools, which are perceived to be higher paymasters compared to other schools. The rest came from government-run institutions and schools with Indian and other curricula. While 48 per cent of the respondents were from Dubai, 43 per cent were from Abu Dhabi and the remainder from the other five emirates.

According to the survey, 44 per cent of teachers said their salaries had not increased during the previous year. While 39 per cent were downright "unhappy" with their current salary, 38 per cent were "somewhat happy" and 24 per cent "happy".

Teacher retention was found to be a huge challenge in international schools as they compete globally for the best teaching talent. For example, the survey said nearly 60 per cent of teachers working in American schools are actively seeking employment elsewhere, with 86 per cent of them willing to relocate to another country for a better opportunity.

Teachers' quality

Co-founder of the UAE Learning Network Shaun Robison said: "We've really drilled down into what makes teachers tick and what would keep them here in the UAE. The onus is clearly on schools and school operators as the survey has revealed that many teachers are considering moving out."

8 OUT OF 10 TEACHERS WANT TO MOVE JOB

Survey cites low salaries as the main reason

James Mullan, co-founder of WhichSchoolAdvisor, said the portal's 2015 survey had shown how the single most important consideration for a parent when assessing or choosing a school is the quality of its teachers. "This year's survey revealed that 52 per cent of the teachers hold a masters degree, yet this quality enables them to choose from other teaching destinations, including those overseas in countries like the US, Australia, Hong Kong and Qatar."

He said the survey highlighted the impact of the rising cost of living for teachers, who frequently voiced a lack of savings and a desire for a better salary.

Robison said teachers who did not get a salary increase last year would be approximately four per cent worse off this year given the current rate of inflation. According to the UAE's National Bureau of Statistics, housing and utility costs increased 8.4 per cent last year, suggesting teachers with accommodation paid for "may have been shielded from the hottest parts of the economy".

The survey showed a significant



44 PER CENT OF TEACHERS SAID THEIR SALARIES HAD NOT INCREASED DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR

percentage of teachers do benefit from some form of 'expat salary package' and housing is its third most common constituent with 47.37 per cent of teachers being given accommodation and 32.59 per cent receiving a housing allowance.

However, it also found 37 per cent of teachers did not get annual air tickets to travel home and 31.4 per cent were not part of an insurance scheme, in contradiction to mandatory labour requirements. It showed 30 per cent of teachers are either new to the country or not on full time, permanent contracts.

The survey said 21 per cent of teachers received a furniture allowance and 11.4 per cent a relocation allowance. Very few teachers got gym (2.43 per cent) or club (0.4 per cent) memberships.

Mullan said pay scales globally vary, with Luxembourg offering the highest average annual salaries (\$99,000), followed by Germany (\$65,000) for secondary school teachers with 10 years of experience. England is close to the OECD average (\$45,095). "We cannot benchmark against that



Duo behind the survey. Shaun Robison and James Mullan

with our survey, however it does reveal pay scales in the UAE vary widely and significant variations are found in curriculum, classification of the school, age of the school, length of teacher's service, whether it is a profit or not for profit school etc."

Need for innovation

Robison said, "In the broadest of brush strokes however, the most common monthly salary range given in the survey is from Dh16,000 to Dh20,000, which is a range of between \$55,000-\$65,000 per annum. Given the UAE is also a tax free environment, it does suggest UAE teachers are paid above average OECD rates. Despite that, it is clear that salary does not exist within a vacuum, and the UAE is an increasingly expensive place to live and work. Private schools in the emirates will need to be increasingly innovative in pay and salary packages if they are to both retain their margins, while attracting the top tier talent they need to justify their fees - particularly in the UAE's growing number of premium schools."

According to Mullan, "The fight for talent is not limited to the UAE - but is global. For that reason we expect to see more innovative solutions like Arcadia's apartment block it is building for its staff."

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"The onus is clearly on schools (to retain talent) as the survey has revealed that many teachers are considering moving out."

SHAUN ROBISON,
CO-FOUNDER OF THE UAE LEARNING NETWORK

52%
teachers in the survey hold a master's degree

70%
teachers work in British, American and IB schools

60%
of teachers working in American schools are currently active in seeking employment elsewhere