

# **Qualitative Survey of English Language Teachers in Ireland during the COVID-19 Pandemic English Language School Closure**

April - May 2020



**Unite ELT Branch**  
Completed 8 June 2020

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## List of Terms

**ELE English Language Education**

**ELT English Language Teaching**

**ELTs English Language Teachers**

**ESL English as a Second Language**

**JLC Joint Labour Committee**

**ILEP Interim List of Education Providers**

**WRC Workplace Relations Commission**

**TASC Thinktank on Action for Social Change**

**PUP Pandemic Unemployment Payment**

**WSS Wage Subsidy Scheme**

**DOS Director of Studies**

**ADOS Assistant Director of Studies**

# Executive Summary

Analysis of this survey shows that as **low paid workers in a precarious sector**, ELTs are under exceptional stress. This survey strongly suggests that **clear regular communication** with ELTs by government and owners and **fair treatment of ELTs as significant stakeholders** in the ELE sector in Ireland would be of benefit to teachers and students.

The ELTs surveyed have generally been working in ELT for over 5 years, are union members, and are living in rented accommodation.

They reported their schools to be functioning well, at good capacity in general, and teachers were looking forward to positive changes in the sector when their schools were closed by government order on 13 March 2020 to slow the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Teachers were generally informed by email as to the school plans and two-thirds of respondents said their schools did not offer online lessons in the immediate weeks following the restrictions.

Regarding employment, significant decisions were taken by ELT employers: termination; temporary layoff; direction to apply for the Pandemic Unemployment Payment; or whether to offer online teaching with/without reduction in hours/pay. **Two-thirds were dealt with as a class of employees collectively without the benefit of individual contact.** The remaining third were notified with individual arrangements. Schools at least temporarily withheld pay for about half of the respondents on Friday 13 March (ruled as force majeure) and the following Monday 16. Only about three-quarters received pay for the Irish national bank holiday 17 March. Most filed for pay normally at the end of March.

**24% of respondents reported students receiving refunds.** 97% said students at their school were offered some form of online learning with many **price, quality, and supply issues** mentioned in almost every case. Participants noted and described numerous **ethical, pedagogical, labour rights, and customer rights issues indicated in the provision of online learning.**

Teachers' experience was divided: the majority were laid off at some point many after receiving a single **day or afternoon of training on a video conferencing platform.** Some were still teaching through the month of April. Training was problematic and class numbers were variable due to students travelling home and confusion about whether class attendance was mandatory or not during the crisis. The vast majority of teachers are concerned about their jobs, their income and accommodation. **Most were not aware of the government sponsored and recommended Wage Subsidy Scheme as their ELT employers simply laid them off without engaging.**

Nor were they aware that the government had established a **COVID-19 Working Group** for the sector. This survey shows that if they could choose who to be included, they would include teachers and students. As the situation stands, **both teachers and students are currently excluded,** and teachers are excluded in many cases without means of contact.

**Three-quarters of respondents reported being members of a trade union** - with the majority holding a favourable view of the dominant union, Unite, and a favourable view of Unite's representation.

Teachers were **severely negatively impacted by the closures** and manner in which the closures were managed, how communications with their workplaces were severed, and how the nature and quality of their work and income changed. The impact on their students seems to have had a significant negative impact on teachers as well.

**The recommendation of this survey is to include teachers in the Working Group** for the ELE sector. This recommendation is made in the current absence of links and communication with employers and variance of links to their employers, whether current or former. Teachers are **clearly significant stakeholders in the Irish ELE sector**, and not only because of their student facing role. **Their exclusion** not only poses a risk to the teachers themselves, the students, and the schools, but **is detrimental to the sector's ability to uphold values of efficiency, inclusivity, diversity, and quality.**

A move towards recognition of the importance of teachers by the COVID-19 Working Group would eliminate the need to direct the action of individual independent employers and create **direct channels of communication with the teaching community** who experience the problems of precarious employment in this particularly sensitive industry.

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online via SurveyMonkey from 7 April to 1 May through a branch committee meeting 17 March 2020. Starting 7 April 2020 a link was shared through various social media and the Unite ELT branch membership mailing list. 61 English Language Teachers (ELTs) took part.

There were 19 questions: 17 open-ended, one closed, and one multiple selection question. This survey provides a unique data stream for stakeholders in the English Language Education (ELE) sector.

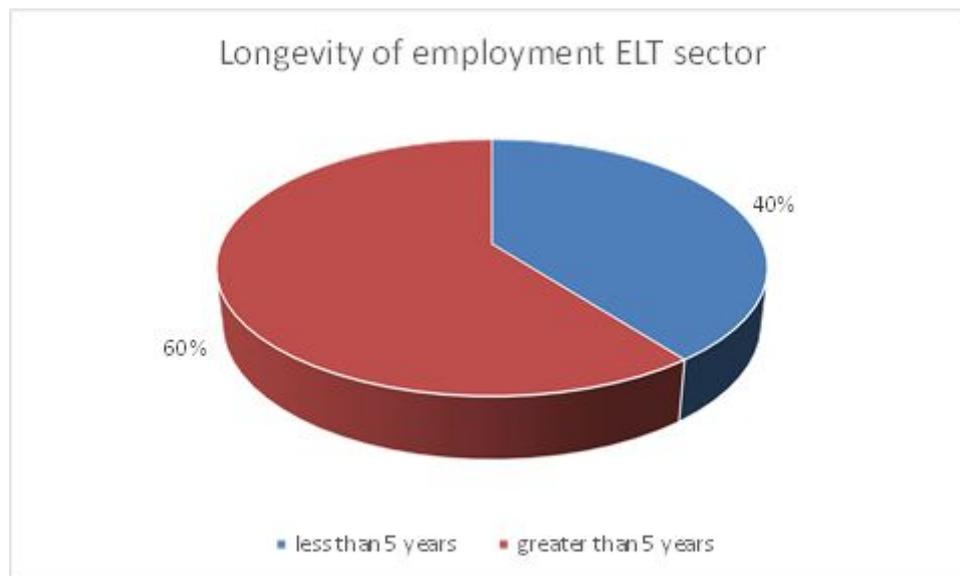
All questions were voluntary.

Personal data was not required and cannot be shared.

A follow-up survey is in progress.

## Q1 : Teachers' Situation Prior to School Closures

Employment in the English Language Education seems less than ideal but not as short-lived an experience as portrayed. **Nearly two-thirds of respondents had worked for over five years as teachers.**



- *'Almost 20 years experience. Last 7 years in the same school '*
- *'6 years of experience - 7 different employers'*
- *'41 years experience.'*

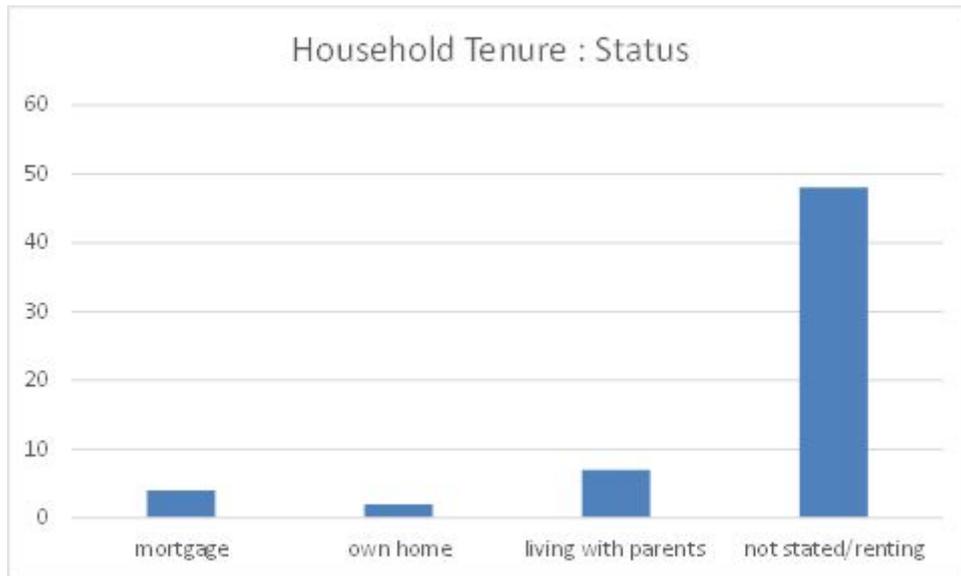
This belies, however, a number of heartfelt comments made relating to the **quality of employment** per se :-

- *'I had been teaching for 15 years and was working as a senior teacher... had been feeling down by the industry in general ... job hunting for over a year to get out of ESL altogether due to the way teachers are treated by private schools'*

With complaints of precarity and low-pay rampant we should remember that :-

*'from the perspective of those in employment, quality might relate to working conditions and income, and in particular whether this income allows for a suitable standard of living.'* - Quality of Employment: Indicators and Trends, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, October 2019

According to the CSO's Census of Population 2016, **'renting** was the tenure status for almost 30 per cent of all occupied dwellings in the last census.' However, nearly 80% of those surveyed stated that they were renting (or were assumed to be) – **over two and a half times more likely to be so doing than the general population.** This may be the effect of low-pay and precarious hours as indicated by TASC in their 2018 report.



Nearly **three-quarters** of respondents described themselves as being **members of a union**.



Unfortunately, in the **absence of regulation and enforcement** by the state, the private education sector has long been characterised by multiple instances of staff being bullied and victimised – particularly for those teachers known or suspected of being union members.

- *'My employer is [...] and they were uncomfortable with staff being unionised.'*
- *'I am not a member of a trade union, as my employer had made it clear that it was not desirable.'*
- *'I wasn't in any union, I never even heard there was a union'*

## Q2 : School Conditions Prior to Closures

Typically, pay in ELT is only awarded for hours spent teaching classes to students. This at a wage for the timetabled contact time (face-to-face time) with students. So any student reports, meetings, preparation/correction time goes unpaid though a single hour may be given or a clause may be in a contract saying that all teaching activities are 'included in the rate' so it is often the case that all interactions with students outside of group tuition time is unpaid work.

And yet teachers' success in getting and keeping classes and students assigned to them depends to a large degree on this unpaid work. The actual hourly rate when these hours are calculated in is significantly lower - and as such compares directly to low paid workers operating in sectors that do not require third level education as a prerequisite for entry. Surveys have found that on average, teachers (full time, defined as those teaching 30 contact hours per week) will spend between 4 – 6 hours per week on non-contact work, but many teachers report spending between 7 – 13 hours. Unpaid work on a small hourly wage has led to the appearance of part-time work while full time hours or more are required. It was not surprising that respondents mentioned the apparently **anarchic pay structures** and the **lack of provision for sick pay**.

Just 17% described the school as functioning poorly :-

- *'In my six years there the school had a very poor management structure which dis-improved when the school was bought by The [...] Group in 2016 . The building was crying out for refurbishment but this never happened. In my opinion the teachers were exploited.'*

The vast majority felt that the **school was functioning well or very well**. Student numbers were high, although wages were generally not:

- *'School seemed to be doing very well financially/in terms of new students. Teachers have been in dispute with school over pay and conditions for about 18 months.'*
- *'Generally KPI's seemed healthy although recent policy of lack of supply of cover teachers necessitating that Ss be sent home increasing - as was a policy of merged classes in the event of teacher absences (planned and unplanned).'*
- *' Classes were full to capacity.'*
- *'At max capacity €15-17 ph'*
- *'Constant, gradual increase of staff and students. But I was only earning €15.50 an hour.'*

Opinions on conditions generally were divided, with many teachers commenting on **buildings and equipment** as being **sub standard** :-

- *'Main building in shambles. Staff room disorganised, textbooks old and only one photocopier.'*
- *'continuous problems with photocopiers not working, furniture breaking and not being replaced and delays in contract renewals.'*

- *'Conditions were poor, constant leaks on the stairs and in the bathrooms. '*
- *'building is old - Georgian, and so poor conditions - not enough facilities such as toilets, heating is a bit wonky, no disabled access. IT resources are there but poor, Large Screen to facilitate presentations for class, but ergo-dynamic nightmare for teachers to work on. Neck and back stress, impossible.'*

Again many teachers commented on their individual terms and conditions of employment :-

- *'Staff morale low ..owners increasingly hostile and punitive toward known union members...conditions for ELT staff unimproved despite constant assurances by owners'*
- *'Low student numbers due to problems with ILEP which restricted sales. Pay hadn't been increased in years. Fixed-term contracts weren't renewed.'*
- *'Pay was a worrying issue for most teaching staff as the cap is 16.60, negotiations had started between school and unite last year but were never continued this year'*
- *'There was communication with staff but not a lot of engagement or dialogue.'*
- *'teachers have been engaged in long-running discussions with management regarding unpaid preparation time '*
- *'union bashing tactics and no pay for prep.'*
- *'We were due to go to WRC to improve pay and conditions.'*

In fact the work of the WRC (Workplace Relations Commission, Ireland) was formally supplemented in 2019 by the state appointment of a **JLC (Joint Labour Commission)** for the English language education sector. In his announcement of the establishment of the JLC, Minister for Trade, Employment, Business, EU Digital Single Market and Data Protection Pat Breen TD noted that **'the JLC provides an opportunity to address many of the employment related issues that have damaged the reputation of this sector in recent years and to place the industry on a stronger footing for the years ahead.'**

Many of those issues were cited afresh in responses to this section :-

- *'Pay talks on hold apparently due to JLC situation'*
- *'If you worked there 4 years you could become salaried (€27000) €16.56 per hour'*
- *'Terrible pay'*
- *'Pay was unevenly distributed based on talking to other teachers about wages'*
- *'different rates negotiated by staff individually over the years, no pay scale. current €19.00 - €24/5'*
- *'can rarely get time off and summer was already mostly booked out (first come, first serve) and asking for days off sick is usually difficult too. Just not enough staff. We've been getting*

*pay increases regularly since 2017. These are usually a response to the lack of staff and that most schools pay more. If you ask around you can easily find out that the rates are random. They say it's decided by experience and such, but really it's decided by who asks for more money. '*

- *'everyone has a different agreement so I don't know the others'*

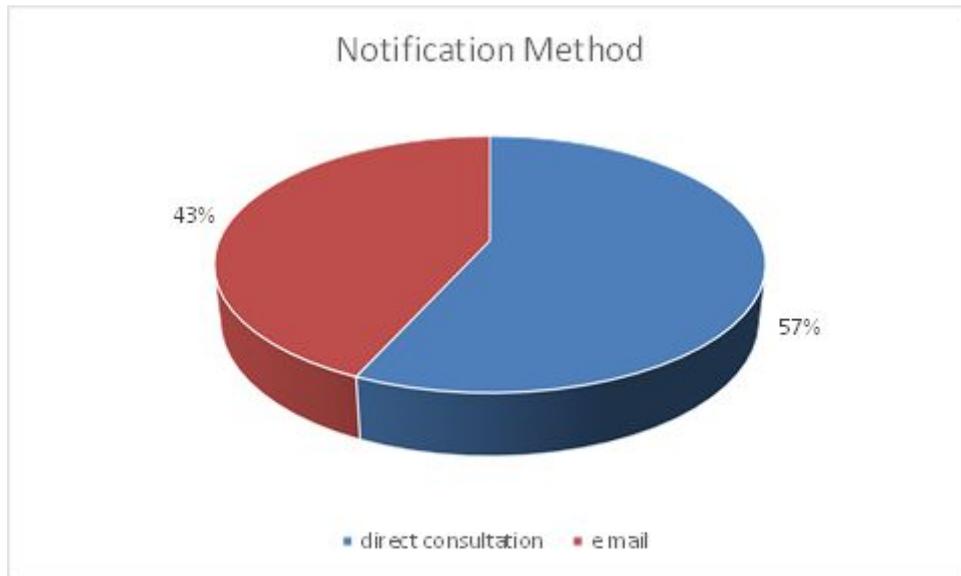
Whilst there is no legislative provision for mandatory **sick pay** in Ireland, it is interesting to compare the voluntary provision made for **state employed teachers**. According to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 'For an ordinary **illness**, a **teacher** has access to **183 days** of **paid sick leave** in a rolling four year period.'

The experience, for many teachers working in the commercial English Language Education sector, is rather different:

- *'We have holidays but no sick pay.'*
- *'Pay low and no sick pay or preparation time paid'*
- *'The school was completely full. I was doing extra hours because there were so many students..... no paid sick leave.'*
- *'Required doctors note off of sick (but no sick pay) along with an 'interview' on returning, including for one day absences'*
- *'There remained the issue of sick pay, which was non-existent '*
- *'No sick leave, no job security, etc. the usual!'*

### **Q3 : How were teachers notified that there would be a change due to the government announcement on the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic?**

On March 12<sup>th</sup> a little over half of all teachers were informed, through direct consultation, that the state mandated school closures would commence the following day as part of restrictions to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Just six were correctly advised that they would be laid off immediately – and, as such, entitled to apply for social welfare. Instead **multiple school owners attempted to coerce their staff to finance the following day, Friday March 13<sup>th</sup>, through allocation of either sick or holiday pay :-**

- *'Teachers advised to use holiday pay to cover wages for March 13th (when school closed)...bullying response from Mgmt. when inequity of same multiply pointed out'*
- *'Short meeting in teachers' room. Owner spent 5 min and then left not to be seen again. DOS handed out forms which were inadequate for welfare claims.'*
- *'We were told in person we would continue regular (6 hours) classes online from home. After one week, Friday at 5, we were called to a Zoom meeting saying we would only have 15 hours the following week and that the school was on the verge of going bust.'*
- *'we needed to take a sick day to get paid. After that we taught online for a period of two weeks and then were laid off.'*
- *'we will be proactively engaging with you on an individual basis around how this time off can be facilitated, i.e. annual leave or unpaid leave etc.'*
- *'Communication was not the best. Quite dismissive'*

#### **Q4 : What arrangements were proposed for students and classes?**

**Students were variably advised** of at least three options – one of which was to attend online classes for which, generally, teachers had been unprepared and/or had not been trained for.

- *'To put course on hold or to go home to their country.'*
- *students granted default attendance via gvt order of some kind, vague assurances of online classes if necessary in future*

- *'school set up an online for students - a self access resource, not with teachers "Real English". Admin staff put up some videos and did some interactive things, but I don't know what. No teachers involved in this.'*

Whilst **almost two-thirds of schools purported to offer teaching online**, after the first few weeks the transition was chaotic.

- *'online teaching proposed after a week or two for those teachers who were interested after a week or two of closure'*
- *'On-line classes which were stopped after a week. No training was given '*
- *'online initially then the set up a European, Asian and American online academy and we were all let go'*
- *'Initial vague proposal for virtual classes via Zoom'*
- *'They said they couldn't or wouldn't be able to do online at that point.'*



Essentially **most part time and cover teachers were either permanently or temporarily laid off** and their **classes awarded to either administrative/management staff** or those teachers who, unusually for this sector, had contracts with their school :-

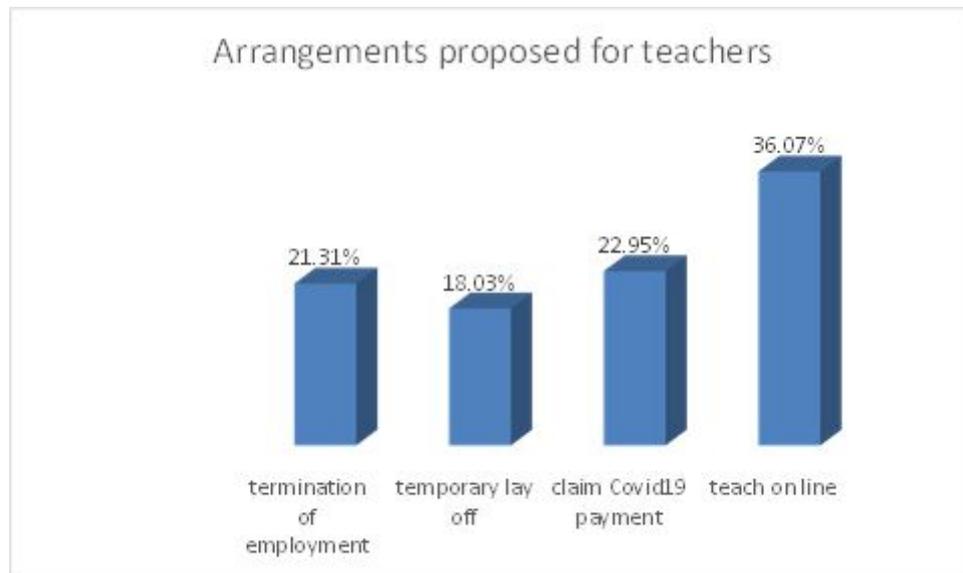
- *'Teachers on salary and Ados/Dos to run online classes '*
- *'some online classes provided by mgmt.'*
- *'Nothing transparent. Quietly forced salaried academic staff to teach online whilst also running everything.'*

- *'They want us to teach online but pretend we are not because we are on welfare. Students are not happy because they got one hour instead of three. I declined the opportunity to teach online because I want to do everything legally and have peace of mind.'*
- *'majority of teachers were temporarily laid off one week after online classes began.'*

## Q5 : What arrangements were proposed for teaching staff?

Responses here paint a near anarchic and extremely disorganised set of changing reactions from individual school owners, reflecting the lack of a coordinated response in the commercial ELE sector:

- *'We were encouraged to think of taking annual leave'*
- *'Staff were told to use any holidays they had left to cover them for payment.'*
- *'Taking annual leave until we got back to work'*



A fifth were perhaps fortunate in being told that they had been let go, and clearly directed to seek social welfare support immediately.....

- *'we were informed by email to apply for social welfare as the school would be unable to pay our wages.'*

....whilst **40% received notice that they had been temporarily laid off** (furloughed). As the situation evolved, and the availability of state provision in the form of the Covid19 payment, officially the Pandemic Unemployment Payment, was clarified, staff and schools alike began to recognise the dawn of a new, albeit confused, economic reality.

- *'On the Thursday of the second week of this rotation (4th week of shutdown) they called each of us individually to lay us off. Then they gave 10 "random" teachers classes. These teachers are salaried staff and 3 others who were chosen for unknown reasons.'*
- *'One teacher with significant online ELT experience sent a helpful email saying numbers and class times must be reduced for online ELT to be equally effective. That advice was taken, thankfully. Consequently classes were much more manageable. We taught for a week and half in this way. Then all more senior teachers were asked to take a week of holiday to help the more junior teachers get hours and not be put on the PUP immediately.'*
- *'Temporary Lay-off. Advised to apply for COVID\_19 UP and thereafter Job Benefit'*
- *'temporarily laid off so we could claim the dole. And then some teachers have been given online classes'*
- *'Online classes. One week later majority of teachers were laid off.'*
- *'After the two weeks they said we'd review. After this many people students temporarily laid off.'*
- *'We were encouraged to apply to teach online but no teachers from our branch got replies. We were told not to expect pay we used to receive and to work harder to save the school'*

About **one-third of staff 'successfully' transitioned to online teaching**. Many teachers faced a lack of student engagement and participation as a consequence of a Department of Justice ruling that student attendance at online lessons during the first two frenetic weeks would be deemed optional. Many **owners who did quickly move to provide continuity of employment and teacher-student classroom assignment through virtual classes quickly made follow-on adjustments as schools sought to merge classes, reduce student contact hours, and further wage costs as outgoings.**

- *'Normal timetable of 30 teaching hours. Reduced to 15 from week 2'*
- *'Part time hrs and pay through the COVID scheme'*
- *'5 hours a week teaching online'*

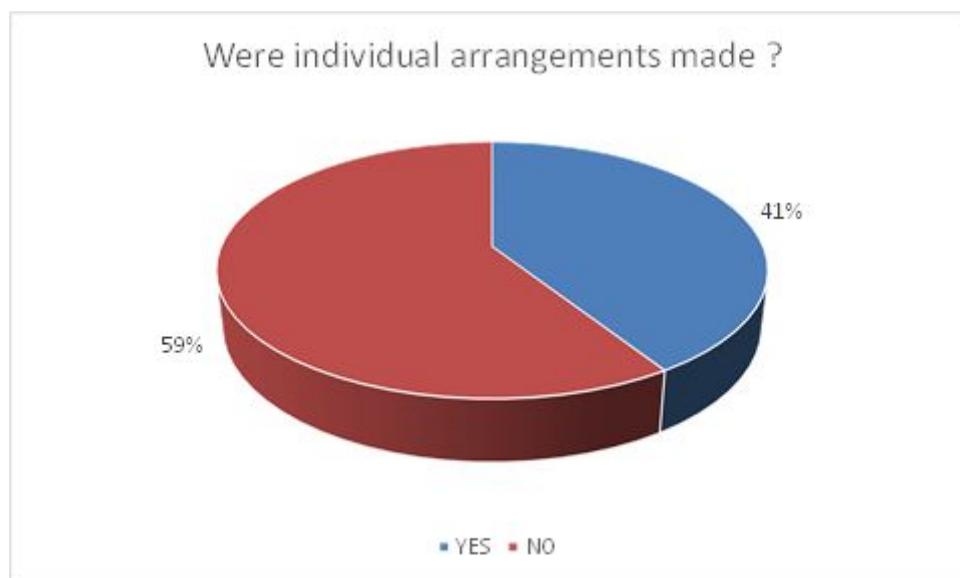
On May 11<sup>th</sup> the DEASP announced that 'There are now over 53,000 employers who have registered with the Revenue Commissioners for the Temporary **Covid-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS)** with at least one subsidy being paid in respect of 456,200 people under that scheme. The number of employees supported at least once under the TWSS has increased from 427,400 as at 30 April.' Predictably perhaps, the **number of school owners availing of the scheme to date appears to be a single digit number – despite multiple requests from teaching staff.**

- *'We strongly requested they use the WSS but they said no. They said there was no chance of a top-up.'*
- *'were told company had to 'shrink the organisation' Wage subsidy scheme not entertained'*

## Q6 : What arrangements were proposed for teachers individually?

For the majority of teachers – none. Most English Language Teaching Organisations have under 100 employees even in their peak summer season: individual contact would likely have been feasible.

**Instead, attempts at communication were often delayed repeatedly or even blocked by management.**



- *'Nothing, they didn't contact me personally'*
- *'No contact made despite many attempts'*
- *'Hahahaha. Nightmare. I asked them to propose online teaching to rest of staff. They only needed one teacher.'*
- *'None! Only to be laid off, permanently (some were given the option of "temporarily").'*

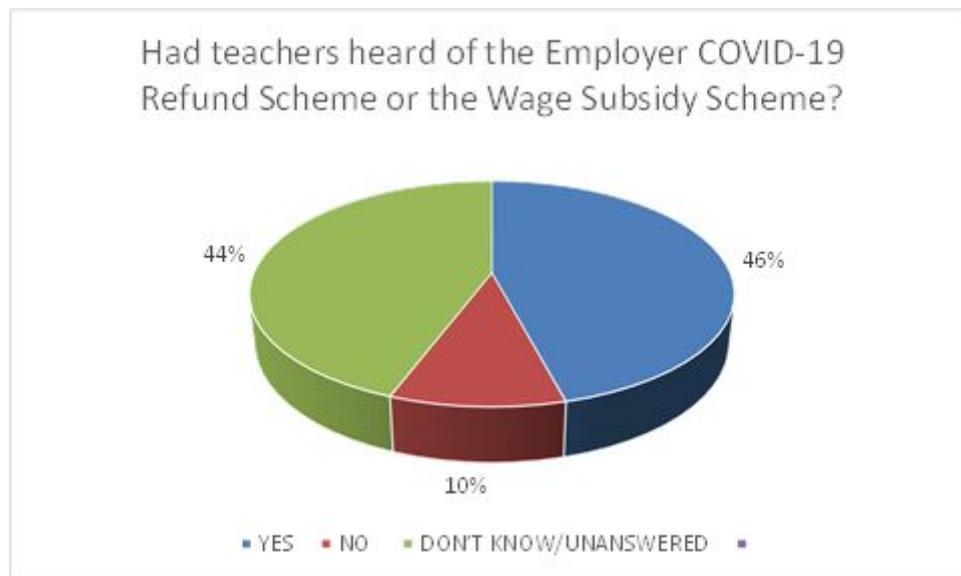
And for those who *had* been offered the option of online classes the situation deteriorated further—especially for the vast majority who had received little or no preparatory training.

- *When I explained what I foresaw as hugely increased workload in preparation of online classes and materials, I was told that teachers who felt they couldn't deliver the online classes had already resigned.*

## Q7 : Had teachers heard of the Employer COVID-19 Refund Scheme or the Wage Subsidy Scheme?

Whilst almost half of respondents were aware of government supports available, as ever this proved to be of little benefit. **In the absence of both regulation and strong union representation, owners continued to prevaricate and, increasingly, curtail all communications with their teaching staff.**

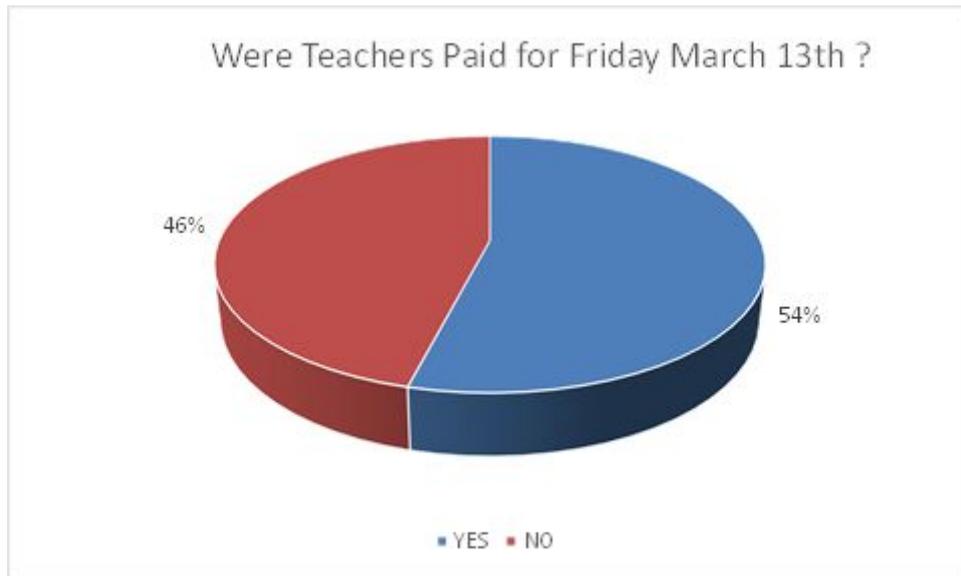
- *Kept changing every few days. First, teaching online at full pay. Then, that was cancelled. Then, pay supplement with government support. Then that too was cancelled.*
- *'They were adamant that this is not redundancy and that we'd be rehired in summer. But when I asked for that in writing they said it would have legal ramifications so that wasn't possible. Quite concerning that we may be cheated out of redundancy payments through this system.'*



### **Q8 : Were teachers paid for Friday 13th March? Monday 16th March? Bank Holiday 17th March?**

The immediate response of half of school owners was to demand that teachers nominate the first day of closure, Friday March 13<sup>th</sup> as either a sick day or holiday day in order to secure pay.

- *'Friday 13th: had to take it as holiday pay'*
- *'all advised to take this as a paid holiday.'*
- *'13th- sick leave'*



Many cited 'force majeure' - a reference to the 'snow days' for which a successful precedent had previously been set in 2018. This was near universally resisted across the sector : **nearly half of all teachers remain unpaid for this day.**

Persistence paid off for a few:

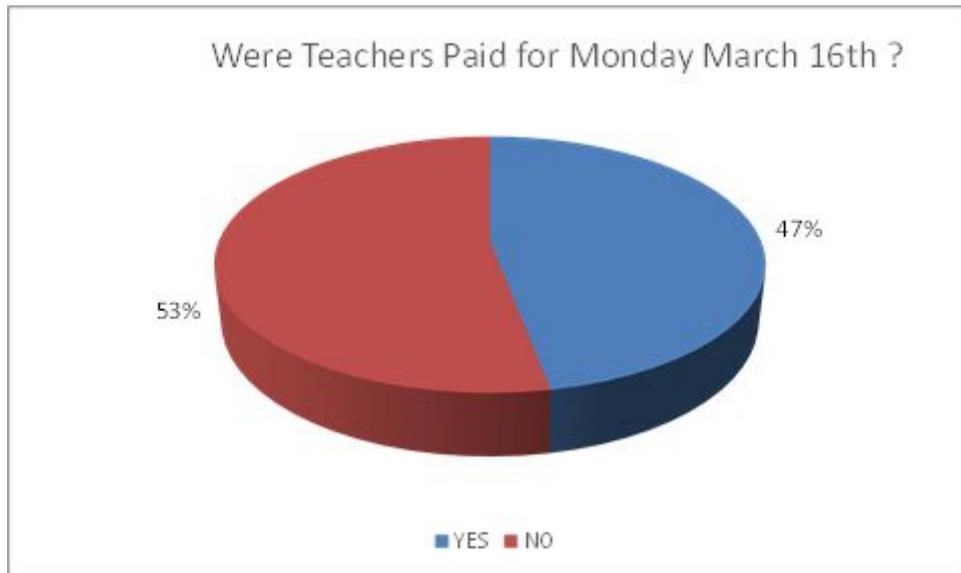
- *'Was told I wouldn't be paid for Monday 16 or Wednesday 18 but as I put them down as force majeure. Initially I wasn't paid for the 16 & 18 but I later I sent information to payroll about this from citizens information & I was then paid for them. I was paid for March 17.'*

**In fact the Revenue subsequently declared the crisis an instance of force majeure for 'tax exiles':**

Under [guidelines](#) issued by Revenue, individual will not be regarded as being present in the State for tax residence purposes for the day after the intended day of departure "provided the individual is unavoidably present in the State on that day due only to 'force majeure' circumstances".

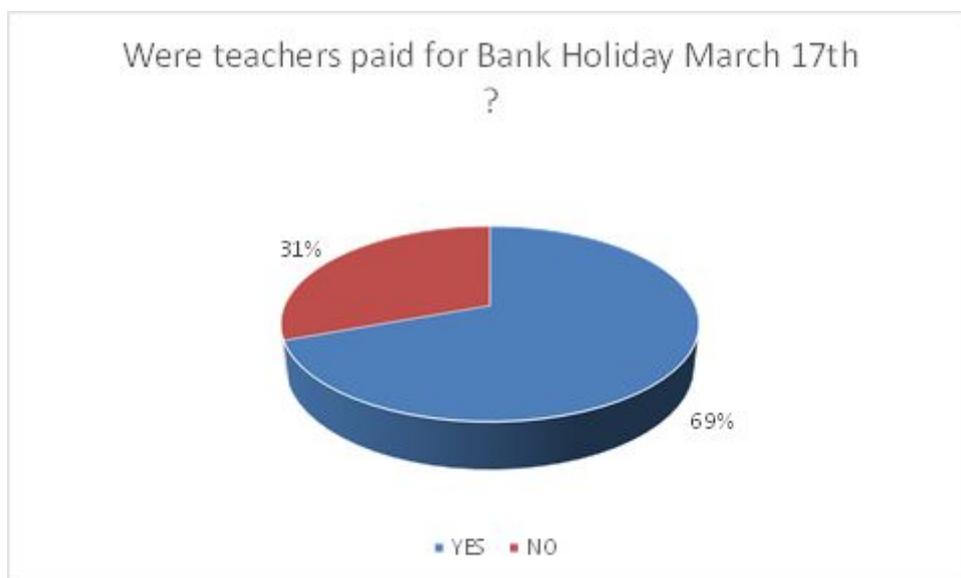
"Where a departure from the State is prevented due to Covid-19, Revenue will consider this 'force majeure' for the purpose of establishing an individual's tax residence position," it stated.

Source : <https://www.thejournal.ie/tax-exiles-revenue-relaxation-catherine-murphy-5067420-Apr2020/>



Similar arguments raged over payment for the following working day – for which **almost a third of teachers were unpaid.**

- *'Not paid for Monday March 16'*
- *'13th and 16th were unpaid. 17th was paid'*



The same proportion were unpaid for the following Friday March 17<sup>th</sup> – a Bank Holiday, for which most employees are statutorily required to be paid.

- *'paid for Friday 13th March. not paid for Monday 16th not paid for Bank Holiday'*
- *'We were only paid for Bank Holiday 17/03'*

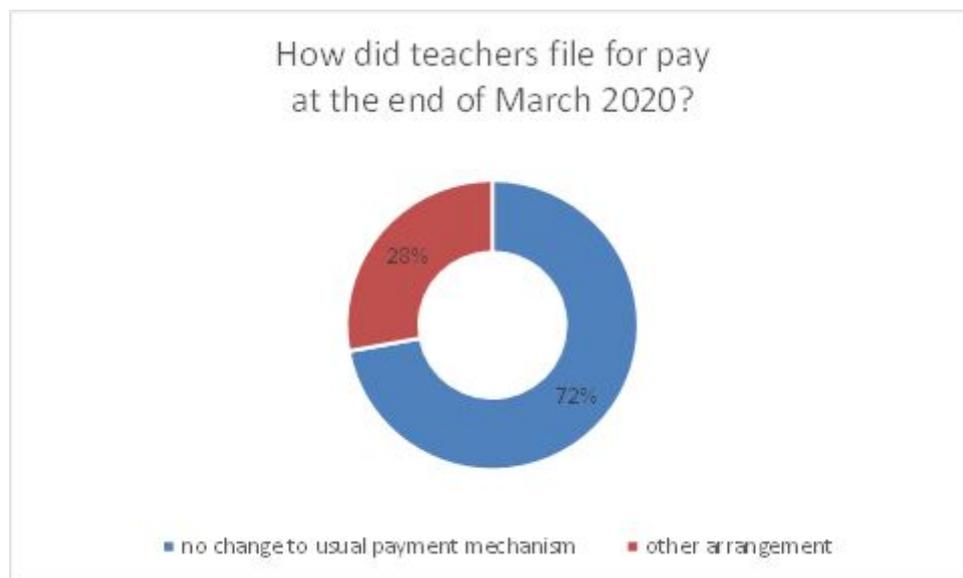
Not so the unfortunate teachers at one Dublin school:

- *'I wasn't paid for the whole month of March. School filed for bankruptcy on pay day without telling as at first.'*
- *'(they were going to pay but then the school went bankrupt so they didn't pay anything)'*

## Q9 : How did teachers file for pay at the end of March 2020?

For most there was no change to the usual arrangements, although **almost all applied personally for the Covid19 payment.**

- *'Paid as usual for first week. Then filed for Covid emergency payment.'*
- *'We were offered holiday pay for the first week of shut down and signed on the second week'*
- *'as usual but individuals made own arrangements - under duress - re Friday 13th via HR app'*



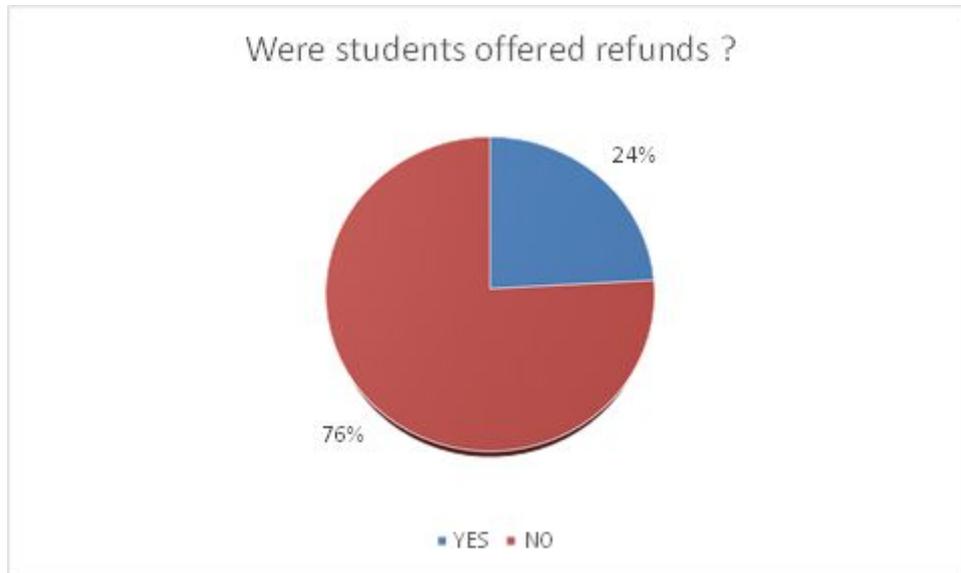
As noted elsewhere in this report, very few owners applied for the **Wage Subsidy Scheme – essentially a mechanism which could reduce teachers' wages by 30% (as initially enacted) given that no respondents reported that owners have elected to top up.**

- *'Applied for Covid-19 payment but it was cancelled after 1 week due to the WSS scheme. I am getting just 47 Euro per week due to low hours worked in January.'*

## Q10 : How do you see the current situation as regards your students and classes?

Teachers were specifically prompted to comment on school policies with regard to refund offers, discount, online classes, transfers, assistance and support – of these, **the frustration, that students and teachers alike felt, at the response of many schools to the issue of refunds, was most striking.**

- *'Ss repeatedly requested refunds - all refused by [] citing online classes as an acceptable alternative to CLT in class. Much frustration on the part of both Ss and T's.'*



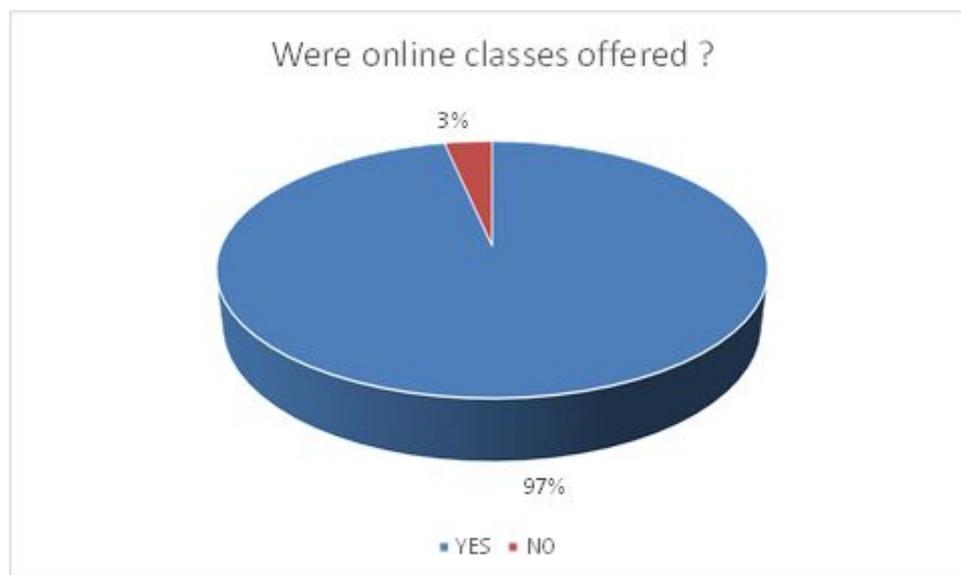
**Citing the Department of Justice stipulation that attendance at classes is a condition of students' study visas, over three-quarters of schools, however, refused to agree to, or even acknowledge, multiple requests for refunds.** And yet an admirable percentage of schools - recognising their **breach of the Sales of Goods** legislation as a minimum - felt able to variously refund students and/or offer reasonable alternatives to the cessation of face to face classes for which their customers had paid.

- *'students were getting refunds and they were getting different class options'*
- *'online classes moved to Europe online academy – some got refunds'*
- *'were offered a voucher for continuing classes post lockdown or online classes but no talk of refund'*
- *They got three options. Option one: online classes, full attendance, and 15% off renewal. Option two: extend course, there course is delayed until the school reopens. Option three: they get a voucher, students must have left Ireland and show proof of this to avail of the voucher only for the remainder weeks of their course and must be used before December 2021. It can also be transferred to another student.'*
- *'have been locked out of all communication.'*

- *'most went home. I think they got refunds and left for Europe, Mideast, and Asia but I don't know. Few stuck out for online lessons. Within a month online teaching was not happening in Dublin.'*

Although addressed more fully later in this report, most schools quickly recognised the threat to their liquidity and ultimate survival, which students' sector-wide requests for refunds constituted. With, at best, **minimal and inadequate online training, teachers were enjoined to prepare to switch, within days, from classroom to online teaching.**

- *'Were told by email we could do online but with no pay available.'*
- *'students sent links to online resources and given contact details if they wanted to work independently and have teachers correct their work, some very limited online classes offered now at the end of April'*
- *'classes they have paid for will be added to their course. Directed online course, no teachers'*



**Multiple issues quickly arose in the absence of sector specific concerted regulation.**

- *'80% cannot access these classes due to their hardware being too weak or connection issues'*

Many of these were, and remain, in clear breach of QQI/ACELS provisions.

- *'Students have been bunched together for levels with minimum staff given classes.'*

Again, the **disparate responses of owners served to further highlight the lack of regulation in the private education sector.** Four respondents reported that students had been allowed to postpone courses.

- *'Students don't get a refund but they can put their course on hold.'*
- *'incoming students were refunded ....Current students were given a "voucher" for hours they lost and they could use this at a later stage when the school would reopen.'*

- *'offered free classes as the school trialled online, then they were offered to take holidays or postponement of classes or online classes'*
- *'No refund offered. They were/are offered classes at a later date, or online. Online teaching a hidden thing for salaried academic staff to deal with.'*
- *Some had their courses frozen and others received a refund'*

**Other legislative anomalies also quickly surfaced** – and will continue to do so as the system comes under increased visibility and the commercial consequences of the crisis continue to make themselves felt.

*'The students were taught online by the academic managers for one week and then, when the school went bankrupt they were put in charge of MEI which was going to transfer them to other schools because they have learners' protection. However, the learners' protection doesn't work for students who paid for the course but haven't come to Ireland yet as MEI CEO said in an interview;*

<https://www.dublininquirer.com/2020/04/08/as-language-school-winds-up-employees-left-wondering-about-pay-and-students-about-fees>

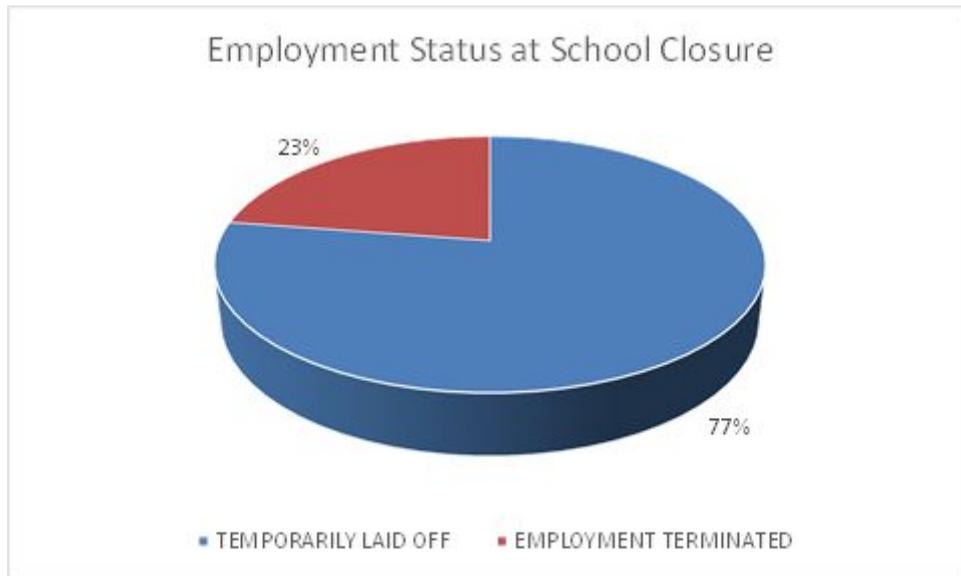
## **Q11 : What has happened to staff since the end of face-to-face lessons?**

Teachers were invited to comment to a range of prompts :

- training to teach online-teaching online for how long / how many / who / how selected-Wage Subsidy Scheme (initially established as "the Employer COVID-19 Refund Scheme")
- lay offs (from when, how many, how selected)
- communications : meetings and advice

**Within the first week, over three-quarters of teachers had been temporarily laid off.**

- *'then we were all of a sudden laid off en masse'*
- *'We were not told the criteria for keeping on the teachers they did but they all seem to be on this "permanent" contract and none of them are in the union. We've been directed to apply for the covid-19 scheme.'*
- *'Only a handful of teachers who have been working with the school for a long time would be working and those who were in the school less would be laid off'*

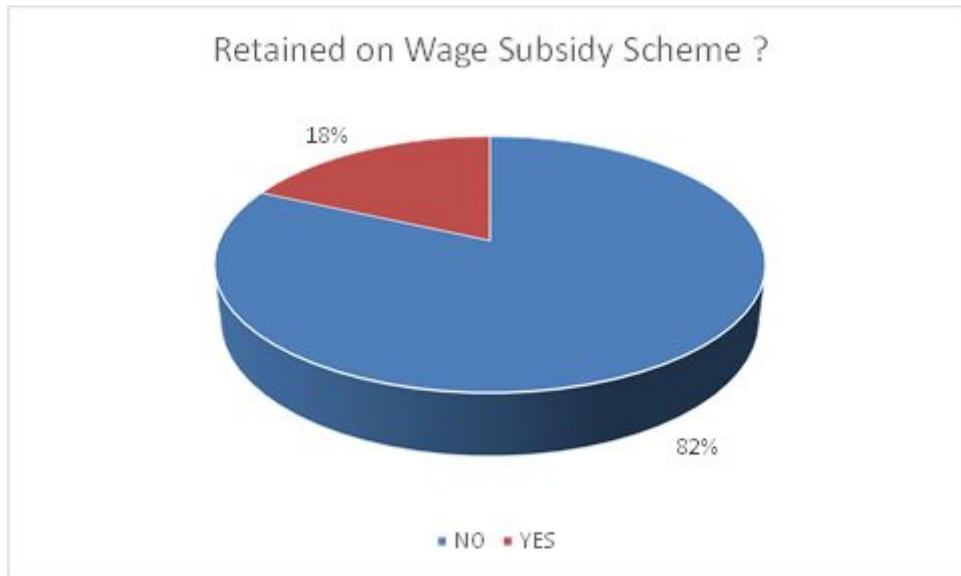


**Of those retained to teach online, the selection criteria appeared to reflect union membership and/or employment status as evidenced by contracts.**

- *'Layoffs were announced on the 3 of April about 4:45 by email for all teachers but two who were privately approached to take lessons. They were less vocal 'private' union members. There was a report of intimidation from one by management to the group. They asked the member to keep the deal private. Within two weeks even this dried up.'*
- *'small number of teachers producing the pre-recorded online content.'*
- *'Just a fight for transparency. Horrible interactions with director. Academic staff overwhelmed. Teachers trying to use social media to inform each other.'*
- *'Lay offs everywhere. Claiming government money'*
- *'paid the remaining annual leave on the 10th of April and the 2 weeks that we weren't given a notice before getting laid off.'*

By mid April, it was estimated that **approximately one-quarter of Ireland's employers had applied for the state's Wage Subsidy Scheme. Predictably perhaps, the percentage of respondents benefitting from this scheme amounted to just 18%.**

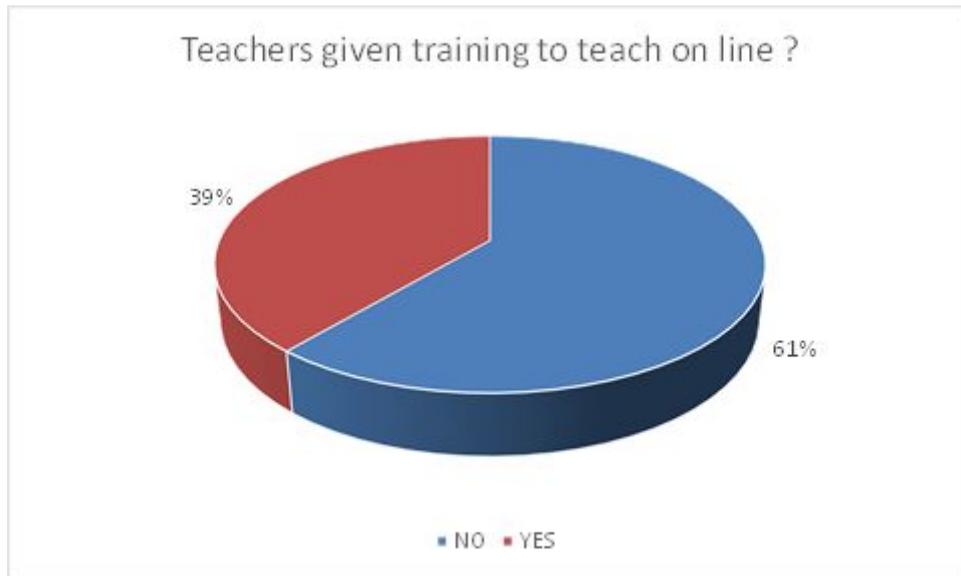
(<https://www.irishtimes.com/business/personal-finance/employers-slow-to-take-up-covid-19-wage-subsidy-scheme-1.4231888>)



- *' We worked normal hours online (which was too much for many students). They refused to use the wage scheme. They sent us the link to the Covid payment, but made 1/3 of us unable to collect it with their roster. Everyone laid off, except salaried and other (quite new) teachers'*
- *' I said yes on condition that my wage would be increased due to extra prep required...now am earning 450 per month as a flat rate after tax. Previously I was on about 400. The college is using the wage sub scheme to subsidise my payment. I also asked for 3 days training but got 3 hours.'*
- *'School went into liquidation on 27th March without ever embracing the Wage Subsidy Scheme'*

For those teachers retained to teach online, the transition to a virtual classroom was marked by inadequate provision for training – and/or **recompense for the significantly increased preparation time required.**

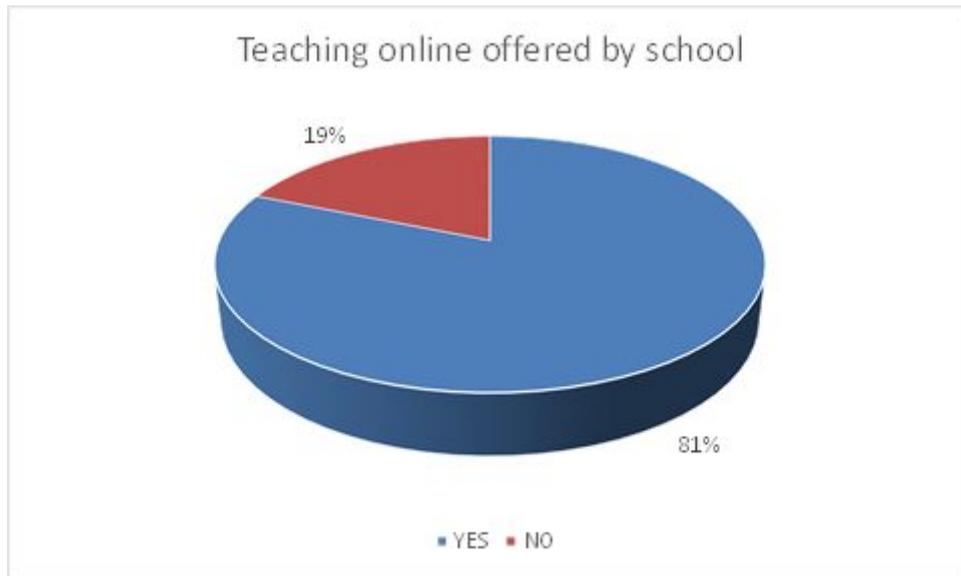
- *'Lay off of all teachers with the option of teaching online while on welfare. Same training provided. A few emails. Teachers who tried online teaching found it awful and time-consuming.'*



- *'Some staff trained to teach online only to be let go with temporary redundancy the next day.'*

As noted above, in order to protect revenue streams most schools attempted to quickly transition to virtual lessons – generally without either adequate training for teachers or provision for equally bewildered students.

- *'three teachers were contacted to do online teaching and the rest were left in the dark.'*
- *Communication has been awful. In the first to weeks we received general updates and then silence. Some teachers then found out from students that online classes were starting but only a few teachers were contacted directly (phone call) to teach and were also told to keep the information confidential. Class numbers were initially small (less than ten) and 4 teachers working. A number of staff collectively sent an email to the CEO requiring weekly updates and asking questions about the online classes. We received a very vague response. Most recently (April 29th) some teachers were again contacted privately to take teaching positions. No information of payment was given. 4 teachers received no email, so it's unknown if there is a criteria for selecting people.*



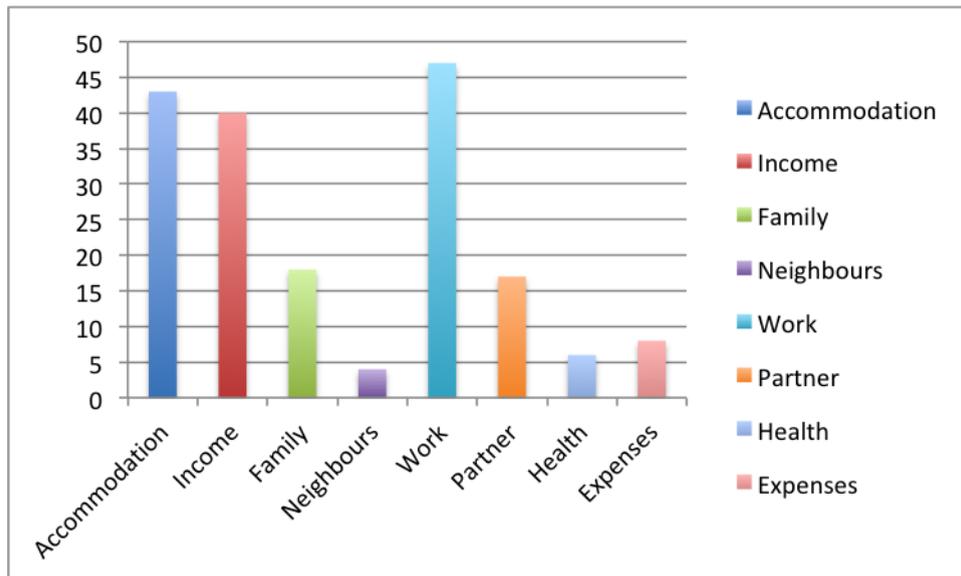
- *'asking us to teach online while laid off, and if no, why not?'*
- *'The academic department of the school (who are salaried) are teaching the classes, one teacher is also now teaching.'*
- *'Most classes online as usual. Covid pay supplementing usual pay. 3 admin staff, 2 teachers laid off'*

## Q12 : Comment on how are you fixed at the moment

Teachers were invited to comment on a range of prompts:

- accommodation
- income
- responsibilities with family, neighbours
- work
- other

Eight themes of the comments responding to the question 'How are you fixed at the moment?' are displayed below in conjunction with the number of respondents (x-axis) addressing each.



As with all questions this was optional. 47 of the 61 respondents chose to answer here leaving comments on the prompts above which they felt significant. The x axis on the graph above denotes the number of responses on each topic. Some themes noted under other included: *Partner, Health, and Expenses*.

The number of comments about *Work* (100%) and *Income* (85%) were very high. Interestingly, the number of comments on Accommodation (91%) was nearly as high as those on Work. This may have much to do with its placement in the question as the first prompt.

Teachers reported on payment changes in their accommodation situation: problems with rental and mortgage solutions; rent reductions; payment holidays; and obstacles to solutions. There was **disappointment and relief expressed in comments about moving in with one's parents again and dependence on one's partner**. The surveyed teachers represent a broad spectrum of accommodation solutions and worries. But the **primary concern was work worries. Mental health issues were spoken of openly** and in reference to the respondents as well as the families and neighbours they cared for. The **need to care for friends and family, both in terms of elder/parental care and sibling and child care, were particularly salient**. English Language Teachers responding gave mention to **caregiving in nearly a third of all comments** volunteered.

- *I receive the covid pandemic payment. My life hasn't changed much yet, but if the school closes or if this lasts very long my lifestyle will change significantly.*
- *I'm working 15 contact hours and need to prep between 6 and 10. We are in the dark as to how much we'll be paid this month, they claim to not know. My accommodation is secure and I live with two friends. I however have no savings and no 'safety net' re help in a financial emergency. My wage is all I have.*
- *My income is only the COVID payment. I pay 610€ a month excluding bills. I also pay 300€ a month in medical bills.*
- *Currently can manage with the 350 a week as my husband is also working in a hotel where they are topping up his pay with the government scheme, which means he's earning the same as me. We have our 3 year old at home. We live in a one-bedroom apartment in the*

city which has been reduced from 1670 to 1300 after I sent an email requesting a temporary reduction. We have applied for rent supplement.

### Q13 : What's your view of the current/future situation with your English Language Teaching school and job?

All respondents chose to answer this question.

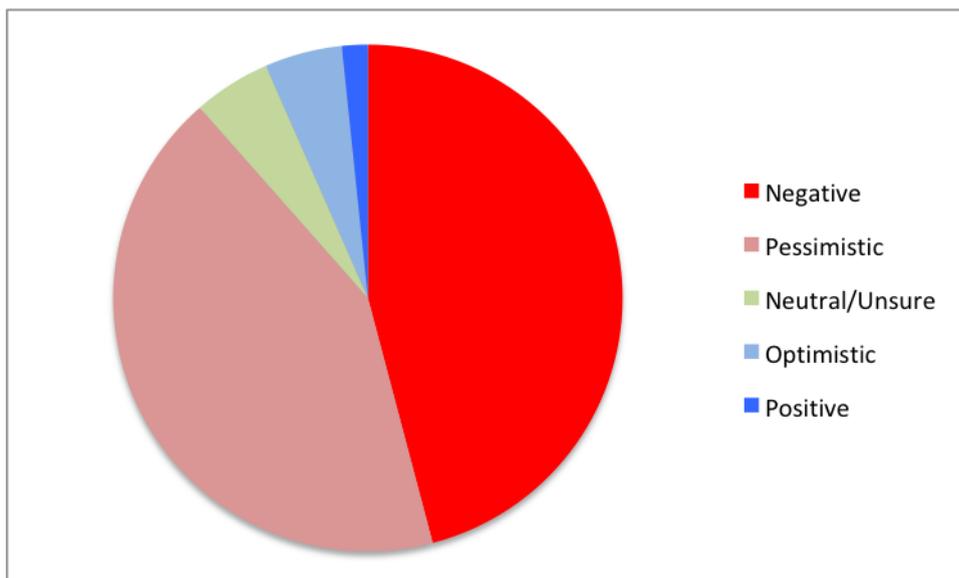
- 88% (54) responded with comments that were coded as negative or pessimistic.
- 4.9% (3) responded in a manner classed as Neutral or Unsure.
- 6.6% (4) responded with comments that were coded as optimistic or positive.

*Negative* answers differed from pessimistic answers in that there were comments revealing finality or permanent change. *Pessimistic* answers indicated a decline but not a permanence or finality.

*Neutral* answers revealed no clear prediction.

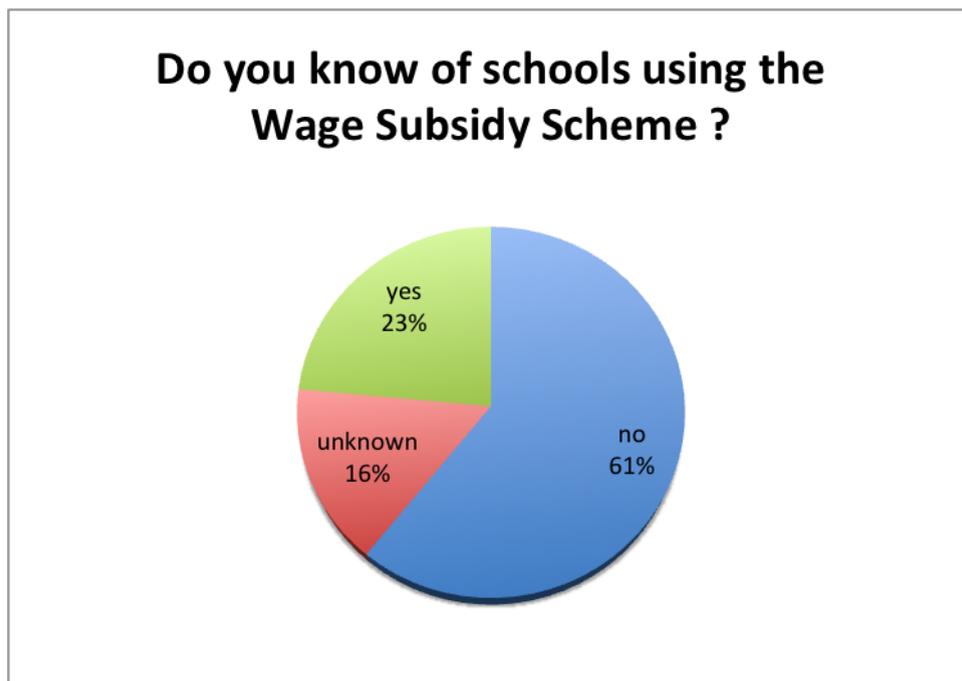
*Optimistic* answers spoke more to the resumption or positive effect of the school shutdown on the industry. There was only a single response which was classed as *Positive*. This is given below with a sample comment after its code.

**Below: Chart displaying distribution of response types to the question 'What's your view of the current/future situation with your English Language Teaching school and job?'**



| Negative <b>28</b>  | Pessimistic <b>26</b>   | Neutral/Unsure <b>3</b>  | Optimistic <b>3</b>  | Positive <b>1</b>  |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| I think the ESL industry is a dead end and it will take many years before anything is done about it. I have vowed to never work for a private ELT provider ever again. I would urge anyone who still lives teaching to look into ESOL community colleges instead of private providers | I don't know if it will open or not and if it does I do not feel happy about going back because of the extremely poor communication/management, disregard of staff during this time and extremely precarious and 'rubbish' contracts. | If schools want to re-open teachers and students should not engage unless minimum standards of employment are agreed for sector and all refunds and reimbursements, redundancy payments are made in full. Teachers and students should lobby government, senators and embassies for support. | Our school will survive. Things will recover in 2021 I may struggle in the second half of 2020 | I feel my job and the school's future is safe. Not completely safe, but nothing to worry about right yet as far as I see it. |

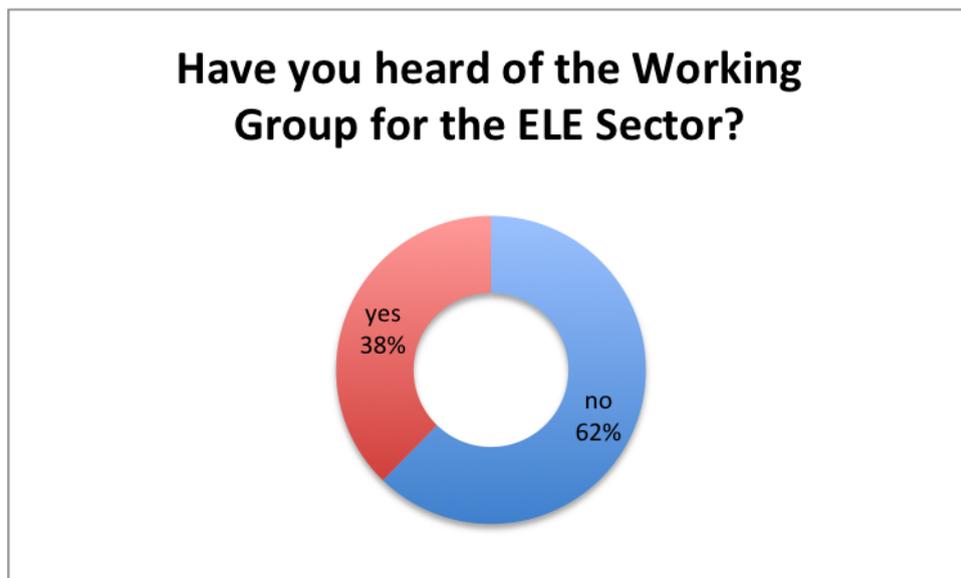
**Q14 : Do you know of any ELT school that has availed of (the Employer COVID-19 Refund Scheme or) the Wage Subsidy Scheme, even temporarily?**



The majority of respondents did not know of schools using the Wage Subsidy Scheme. Comments included names of schools.

- Yes. Ours. They are claiming it for academic and office staff who are on reduced hours. One teacher. As far as i know, no one else.
- I've only heard of layoffs.
- Not sure of the difference but we are receiving covid payment each week.
- No
- think a few have - but most haven't -it suits to let teachers go either temporarily or permanently - as this could go on for a while yet

**Q15 : Have you heard that the government set up a Working Group on the English Language Education sector? (officially called 'the inter-departmental and inter-agency Covid-19 Working Group for the English language education sector')**



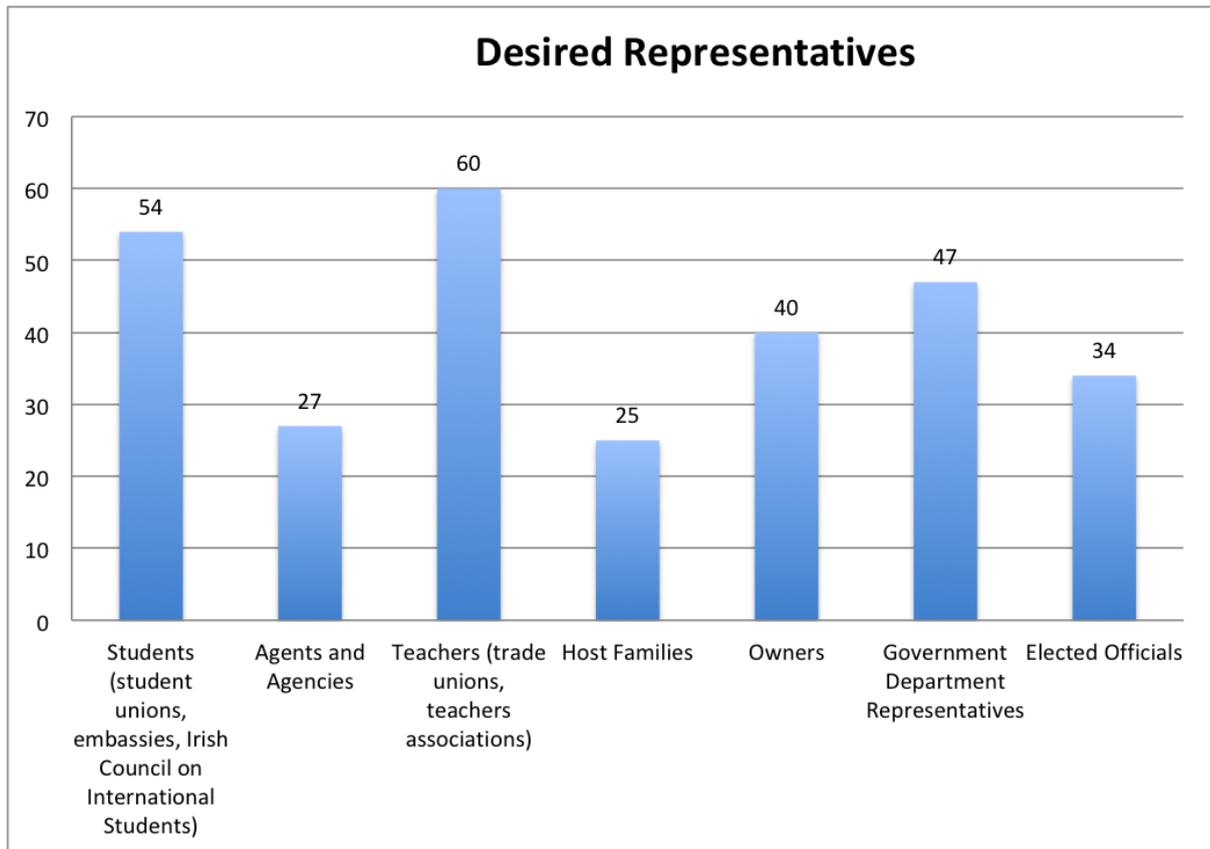
The majority of teachers answering this survey had **not** heard of *the inter-departmental and inter-agency Covid-19 Working Group for the English language education sector*. **It is difficult to imagine how teachers outside of unions were to democratically influence the outcomes of the Working Group if they are excluded and largely unaware that there was a publicly-funded Working Group on the sector they work in.** It is unknown how this information was disseminated to those who had heard.

**Q16 : Who should be included in this Working Group in your view?**

Seven stakeholders in the ELE sector were listed in a multiple choice format along with an 'Other' option.

The suggestions of the other section included seven answers which were, in alphabetical order: **Admin staff representatives (2x), British Council, ‘Everyone in the sector’, Media, SIPTU, and separately ‘Unions’.**

The multiple choice section was not limited or ranked. A participant could select none, all, or a selection of their choice. The results are below:



A comparison with the current composition of the Working Group shows that it is largely similar but with the expectation that teachers be included as major stakeholders in the sector. **Two-thirds would expect or assume there should be a place for government departments and owners and a representative student body.**

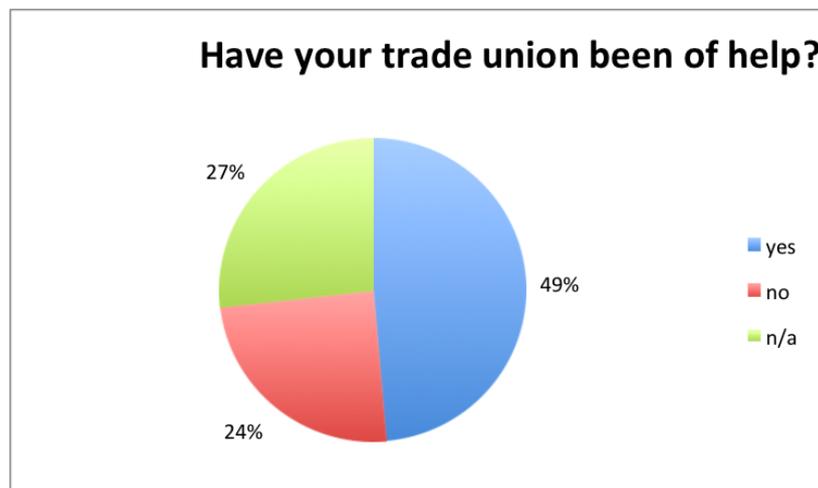
**The outstanding difference between the existing and desired composition is the total absence of any means of representing teachers, who are the contact people in the school which spend the most face-to-face time with the students.** And yet the Working Group’s Terms of Reference specify that **coordinating and leading communications and advice to students is a goal.** Teachers are a trusted source for students. Teachers have unique views on student experience here.

Additionally, **the Working Group’s Terms of Reference speak directly to the Working Group’s role in restarting the sector and resuming lessons,** specifically “Determine and coordinate the policy, operational and communications actions which need to be taken to support expeditious resumption of international ELE activities (when appropriate)”. It is to be expected that teachers would see a role for themselves as key, being both **on the frontline, and at primary risk when schools resume onsite lessons.**

Another question here arises from the **absence of any elected representatives**. Teachers have been given **no** representation or means of communication industrially through their unions as voices for their primary economic and social roles in the state, and in their work as teachers. Equally there is **no formal political representation**, ie no city councillors or TDs or senators from the **Education Committee** with whom teachers can correspond and be assured of accountability regarding the various issues being experienced. The fact that data from this survey indicates the absence of any political or industrial representation by way of teacher or student unions is surprising and has perhaps prompted additional questions.

These questions would regard the view of the ELE sector which informed the ongoing composition of the Working Group. **How would the exclusion of teachers and staff be continued if the terms of reference were to be fulfilled?** The inclusion for example of Unite’s ELT Branch would ensure meeting intrinsic needs for diversity, subject matter expertise, and would help the government distinguish between the best interests of the thousands of **previously unrepresented stakeholders, notably students and school workers**. Further it might address the constitutional preference of the two business ownership representative groups which also themselves **conspicuously exclude** elected teacher and student voices in their structures. **Satisfactory address of these questions would necessitate the inclusion of teachers and students in the COVID-19 Working Group for the ELE sector**

### Q17 : Has your trade union been of help? What should they be doing to help? Have you been notified of any online branch meetings?



27% of those answering stated here again that they were not members of any trade union. This corresponds with the findings from Q1 which suggested union membership as a topic to discuss in an open-ended question prompt. This indicates that **two out of three members surveyed here were totally satisfied with their union and its response** to this crisis and previous events.

Various suggestions were made on how the union had performed in the workplace, as a committee representing the branch, its events and meetings, its advice and assistance, and its leadership and organisation.

- *'They have been trying to organise members in individual schools. But there's not much help for how to organise in this specific situation.'* -NO
- *'UNITE has been very, very proactive. The problem for me is I tread a tightrope at the moment. What was precarious has become potentially catastrophic.'* -YES
- *'Yes the trade union has been helpful, offering information and support. Regular zoom meetings are very useful and it's interesting to note that the only reason I can attend the meetings is because they are now on zoom as previously all meetings (that I am aware of) were in Dublin. I live x hours away from Dublin.'* -YES
- *'I don't have one.'* -N/A

## Q18 : What would you like to see happen?

This was a very wide ranging set of views.

112 different ideas were collected and coded and finally grouped into 6 major themes of action. Of these the **vast majority featured a desire for inclusive government action over teachers taking direct action to resolve issues related to ongoing industrial disputes.**

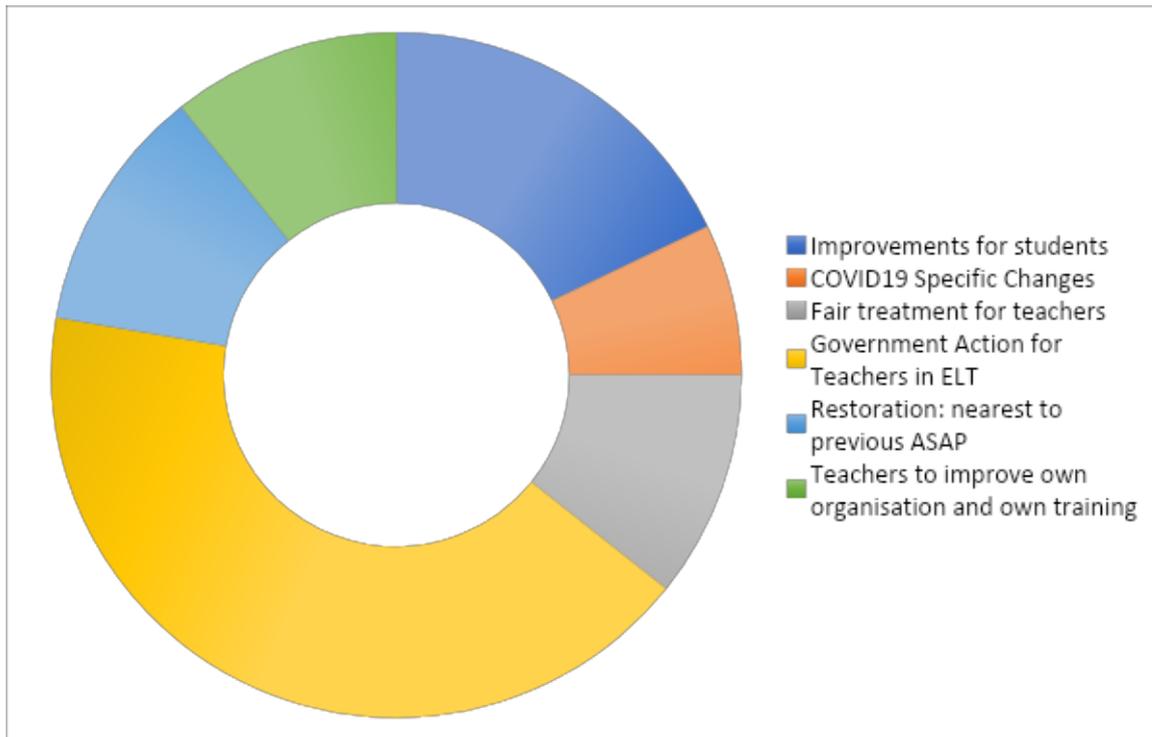
Most respondents took a longer-term view of the sector and the question was answered in this way because almost **half the comments (47 out of 112) underlined the need for Government Action for Teachers in ELT.** 12 answers spoke to the need for fair treatment for teachers. 12 also spoke about the need for teachers to take stakeholder matters into their own hands by various means. 13 simply stated a desire to return to students and lessons, and to the classrooms and schools that they identify with.

There were 20 suggestions that the **industry must improve things for students.** Students are the stakeholders who are most central to the ELE sector. It is with and about them teachers spend their working lives learning.

Clear practical suggestions on how and why to improve and restore service to students were made. Suggestions on how to repair the image of the industry included the following:

- how monies should be kept;
- how requested refunds should be given;
- why security of tuition and access to refunds of tuition funds is key in the current absence of quality standards;
- the range of living and learning contexts English language students experience.

Six themes of the 112 comments responding to the question 'What would you like to see happen?'



## Q19 : How do you feel?

Six participants skipped this open question. 55 participated by writing a series of adjectives or sentences describing their feelings and their reasons for feeling so. The answers were broken down in terms of adjectives used to answer the question and the topic of discussion and stakeholders mentioned.

Unsurprisingly in this time of unanticipated unprecedented change *anxious* and *worried* most frequently (8 each) used and *angry* (5) and *disappointed* (5) were next. Alertness (3), stress (3), and resignation (3) all featured more highly and this may be a natural reflection of the constant information cycles from the workplace and national news. Other adjectives with more than two mentions were *depressed*, *despondent*, *fearful*, *frustrated*, *gutted*, *sad*, and *scared*.

Any of these seven might be a **cause for concern for management if these were mentioned in normal times. A staff member who said they were feeling like this might be called in for a chat. In unusual times, perhaps even more communication is necessary.**

There were also two mentions each of hope and optimism. They set the negativity of the majority in a moving and powerful counterpoint.

There was a series of more unique adjectives. These are listed in the grey outer frame of the chart below. This list is a view into the collective experience of those working as English Language Teachers through this pandemic and closure: anxiety and worry, stress and disappointment, resignation and anger. The absence of communication from organisational leaders and exclusion by other stakeholders in the industry and government may have contributed to these feelings.

Surprisingly the pandemic and its industrial and health outcomes only featured 21 of 55 answers explicitly. A **slightly greater majority were related to ongoing industrial issues** (23 out of 55). Six discussions featured positive stakeholder actions; five, negatives.

The stakeholders who were specifically discussed were teachers (15) owners (14) and managers (10). Five commented on their friends and family; four on government; another four on the union.

|            |                   |                    |              |              |              |                              |            |              |
|------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| powerless  | pissed off        | philosophical      | pessimistic  | nervous      | mixed up     | militant                     | lost       | isolated     |
| privileged | depressed         | depressed          | alert        | alert        | alert        | angry                        | angry      | insecure     |
| proud      | despondent        | despondent         | resigned     | resigned     | resigned     | angry                        | angry      | important    |
| suspicious | fearful           | fearful            | stressed     | stressed     | stressed     | disappointed                 | angry      | happy        |
| terrified  | frustrated        | frustrated         | disappointed | disappointed | disappointed | disappointed                 | critical   | apprehensive |
| tired      | gutted            | gutted             | worried      | worried      | anxious      | anxious                      | curious    | betrayed     |
| trapped    | hopeful           | hopeful            | worried      | worried      | anxious      | anxious                      | cynical    | calm         |
| uncertain  | optimistic        | optimistic         | worried      | worried      | anxious      | anxious                      | deceived   | cautious     |
| united     | sad               | sad                | worried      | worried      | anxious      | anxious                      | defeated   | cheated      |
| unsure     | scared            | scared             | vulnerable   | vulnerable   | used         | used                         | worthless  | despairing   |
| unwanted   | taken for granted | frustrated         | fine         | fear         | drained      | disillusioned                | determined | detached     |
|            |                   | teachers           |              |              | 15           | Ongoing industrial issues    |            | 23           |
|            |                   | owners             |              |              | 14           | Pandemic related issues      |            | 21           |
|            |                   | managers           |              |              | 10           | Positive Stakeholder Actions |            | 6            |
|            |                   | family and friends |              |              | 5            | Negative Stakeholder Actions |            | 5            |
|            |                   | government         |              |              | 4            | DISCUSSION                   |            |              |
|            |                   | union              |              |              | 4            |                              |            |              |
|            |                   | STAKEHOLDERS       |              |              |              |                              |            |              |

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