



# AEP Survey of Trainee and Newly Qualified Educational Psychologists: Bursaries and Contracts

## Background

In spring 2024, the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) conducted an anonymous survey of Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and Newly Qualified Educational Psychologist (NQEP) members, to ask questions in relation to pay and conditions, the bursary and contracted work.

356 responses were received from TEP and NQEP\* members of the AEP (*\*qualified between 2021 and 2023*). The number of responses received by TEP members represented over half of our entire TEP membership.

## Results

TEPs in Years 2 and 3 of their training report **significantly higher take-home pay after tax if they are on contracts** (*an average of £24,922.55*) when compared with TEPs paid via the bursary (*an average of £18,985.93*).

The impact of low bursaries is clearly felt, with **79% of TEP respondents reporting that they are 'unable to live without additional financial support' on bursaries**, compared to only 33% of TEPs on contracts reporting the same issues. TEPs employed on contracts also report benefiting from the reimbursement of travel expenses at a significantly higher a rate (57%), compared to those reported by TEPs on bursaries (11%).

TEPs identified **take home pay, financial benefits, leave entitlements, maternity and paternity rights, legal support, protection and flexibility to choose their workplace** as key benefits of being on a contract, with regards to working conditions.

**69% of all TEP respondents said they would prefer to be paid on a contract, with only 5% of respondents saying they would prefer to be paid on a bursary.**

It is important to note that this sentiment is longstanding within the TEP community. We sent out the same question to NQEPs when surveyed. **Of the 67 responses we received from those that were paid bursaries as TEPs, 52 (78%) said they were unable to live without additional financial assistance.** Of those respondents, **38 (57%) said they would prefer to have been paid on contracts with only 6 (9%) stating they were happy to be paid via the bursary system.**

**None of the NQEPs who were paid on contracts when they were TEPs reported that they would have preferred to have been paid using the bursary system during their training.**

We acknowledge that there have been recent discussions regarding plans to uplift the TEP bursaries in England, but this is not yet consistently applied and does not address the



significantly low bursaries received by trainees in Wales and Northern Ireland. We have also been made aware that many third-year trainees working in Scottish local authorities are currently experiencing financial hardship and we will be promoting a funded training model, including employment-based placements, for the new doctorate in Scotland.

## Conclusions

**If as a profession we wish to continue espousing equality, diversity and inclusion as a value, it is vital that we properly remunerate trainees within our profession.**

- Firstly, this is a moral imperative; all members of the profession should be able to live in comfort and dignity.
- Secondly, if we wish to support people from a diverse range of backgrounds to enter the profession, access to additional financial support should not have to be a prerequisite to training. As the cost-of-living crisis continues, inadequate means while training will effectively exclude those from low-income backgrounds from entering the profession.
- Thirdly, employment status provides a range of protections and benefits, which are vital for all, but are arguably most needed by those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act or other vulnerabilities like insecure finances.

If we are serious about listening to marginalised voices - those with power in the EP profession must listen to those who are in training. TEPs and NQEPs have clearly outlined the benefits of contracts and overwhelmingly stated that their preference is to be paid on contracts instead of bursaries. In the qualitative responses we received, many respondents felt that the inadequate bursary maintained structural discrimination against marginalised groups. Many spoke about low pay impacting their mental health, and their ability to pursue personal goals such as buying a property or starting a family. In these responses, TEPs also point to the hypocrisy of a profession espousing social justice whilst not paying equitable rates to those newest to the profession.

We must work together towards a sustainable training model in which TEPs are paid what they need to live comfortably. Money cannot be a barrier to those talented and passionate people from diverse backgrounds that our children and young people need entering the EP profession. We must also strive for a model which provides the benefits and protections for TEPs, enshrined in employment law and afforded by contracts.

## TEPS – in their own words.

**In conclusion, we share a selection of the views expressed by respondents to the survey in their own words:**

*“The injustice of assistant EPs being paid far more than us despite not having the same experience or level of responsibility, makes no sense at all.”*



*“The Welsh bursaries need to be looked at ASAP as it is a barrier to so many people (parents in particular) and stopping them from being in a position where they are able to apply.”*

*“I dropped out of school. I re-engaged with Education at my local FE college. I've always hoped to go back there and give talks to people like me to encourage them to pursue a career in Educational Psychology. I don't feel I can do that now. This course isn't funded in a way that makes it accessible to people from a disadvantaged background. Unless you're married to someone with a good salary, or have family that can financially support you, then this course isn't for you. This makes me sad, Educational Psychology for me was a way to work towards social justice and help CYP from disadvantaged backgrounds get the most from their Education. How can we do that with integrity when the training to be an EP is so far removed from that.”*

*“Something needs to be done to help support those entering the profession who do not have a financial back up so that we do not end up in a profession that speaks of social justice but does not practise it. I struggle to comprehend how trainees manage it in more expensive parts of the country, e.g., London, and single parent households. A contract should be a given, not a luxury.”*

*“I worry that the current pay situation for trainees in Northern Ireland means we are missing out on hearing from a range of diverse voices. The low pay and lack of rights is a huge barrier to applying. Living on the bursary would be almost impossible for single parents and those who do not have the support network (both financial and otherwise) of family/partner etc around them.”*

*“The funding for the course is a huge barrier to very able and talented applicants getting onto the course. Colleagues of mine have been successful in getting a place on the doctorate which is no small feat given the competitive nature and multiple applications that are often made by applicants, however had to reject the place due to concerns and anxieties around the ability to financially manage the course. In a field which requires EPs to be aware of inequalities (SOPs), it is notable that such barriers still exist to get into the profession.”*

*“We are significantly underpaid to an insulting degree. In comparison to other trainees (clinical) it is ridiculous we are expected to work and work and meet our basic needs on this salary.”*

*“Bursary is too low. The course is made up of largely privileged white people. The bursary perpetuates this.”*