



What are the roles and salaries of school heads?

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- School heads in public institutions are required to work 7-8 hours per day on average across OECD countries. In two-thirds of these countries, they are also required to work during students' school holidays.
- On top of their leadership and managerial role, in 27 OECD and partner countries and economies, school heads are required to take on additional tasks and responsibilities as specified in official documents.
- On average across OECD countries in 2019, the actual earnings of lower secondary school heads were 59% higher than those of lower secondary teachers and 38% higher than those of tertiary-educated workers. However, more than half of lower secondary school heads in OECD countries are not satisfied with their salaries.

School heads take on many responsibilities involved in delivering high-quality education to students. *Education at a Glance 2020* provides information on the roles and salary levels of school heads in public institutions¹ across OECD and partner countries. Although statutory documents give some insight into the responsibilities school heads may have been required to take on during the pandemic, they may not always reflect what happens in practice. This unprecedented crisis means school heads are likely to have taken on tasks that they would not have had to tackle in previous years.

School heads tend to work similar hours to most office-based professionals, including during school holidays

In 2019, on average across OECD countries and economies, school heads were required to work 1 658 hours per year at the pre-primary level, 1 630 hours at primary level, 1 628 hours at lower secondary level and 1 632 hours at upper secondary level. These small differences between levels of education translate into an average of 7-8 hours per day, similar to most office-based jobs. In 21 out of the 29 OECD and partner countries and economies with data, school heads' annual working hours do not vary much across levels of education. In 10 of them, their statutory working time is also similar to teachers at all levels.

School heads' annual working hours vary significantly across countries at all levels of education, much as teachers' hours do. For example, the annual statutory working hours for lower secondary school heads range from less than 1 300 hours in Ireland (a minimum requirement) to 1 971 hours in Chile (a maximum requirement). For teachers, statutory hours range from 1 177 hours in Israel to 1 971 hours in Chile. Five countries and economies do not define heads' statutory working time at all: England (United Kingdom), the Flemish Community of Belgium, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg.

Some of the variation in school heads' working hours may result from the number of days they are required to work over the school year. In 2019, school heads at general lower secondary level worked 210 days per year across OECD countries and economies on average, while students attended 184 days of school. In about two-thirds of the OECD countries and economies with data, school heads' statutory working time includes working during students' school holidays, ranging from about 1 week in Austria to 11 weeks in Turkey. In France, Japan, Korea and Turkey, school heads have the same statutory working time and holidays as civil servants.

School heads' responsibilities go beyond their leadership roles

In 27 OECD and partner countries and economies, official documents explicitly list the tasks and responsibilities school heads are required to take on (but they may not necessarily specify the degree of autonomy for school heads to take final decisions). In the other nine countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Italy, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden), official documents do not detail these responsibilities. School heads in these countries may have more autonomy to organise their work within their statutory working hours (except in Italy, which does not define school heads' statutory working time either).

In the majority of the 27 countries where heads' tasks and responsibilities are detailed in official documents, they are the same for all levels of education and educational programmes. However, the details and the scope of the tasks and responsibilities vary greatly across countries. This may be explained by differences in how key decisions are made in different countries' education systems. For example, at lower secondary level, most decisions are taken at the school level in 16 OECD countries, while most are taken at the state or central level in 14 OECD countries (OECD, 2018^[1]).

In 17 of these 27 countries, the official documents describe school heads' responsibilities for the management of human resources such as the appointment, dismissal, promotion, organisation and evaluation of school personnel. In 12 of the 27 countries, school heads are required to manage financial resources and are involved to various extents in budget planning, allocation of resources and/or monitoring expenditure. For example, in TALIS, more than 95% of school heads in public institutions self-reported that they have autonomy over "appointing or hiring teachers" in the Czech Republic, Iceland, Lithuania, the Russian Federation and the Slovak Republic, while less than 5% report such autonomy in Colombia, France and Turkey. In four of the countries where school heads' responsibilities are not officially listed (Denmark, Estonia, New Zealand and Sweden), more than 95% of school heads self-reported that they have autonomy over hiring teachers (OECD, 2020^[2]).

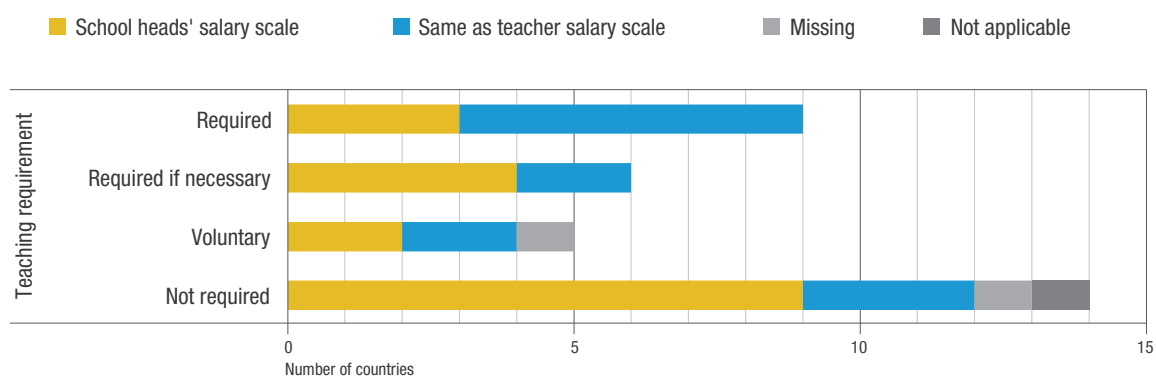
In less than half of the 27 countries, lower secondary school heads can also be required to facilitate good relations with parents, other schools, the education inspectorate and/or government; supervise and counsel students; and/or take responsibility for the professional development of teachers.

In more than two-thirds of the 27 countries, school heads may have duties related to the educational activities of students: planning and developing educational activities, directing teachers to carry out the curriculum, monitoring students' academic achievements and/or teaching students. Lower secondary school heads (in public and private institutions) report spending 16% of their working time on curriculum and teaching-related tasks on average across the OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018, after administrative tasks and meetings (30% of working time) and leadership tasks and meetings (21% of working time) (OECD, 2019^[3]).

In fact, some school heads were previously teachers: the average OECD school head in a lower secondary school has nearly 20 years of experience as a teacher (OECD, 2019^[3]). School heads and teachers may also have the same status in some countries as both are paid in accordance with teachers' salary scales. At lower secondary level, teaching is often mandatory for school heads in the countries where they are paid according to teachers' salary scales with an additional school-head allowance. In many countries where they are not required to teach or are exempted from teaching duty under certain conditions, school heads have their own salary scale (Figure 1).

Figure 1. School heads' statutory teaching requirements, by type of salary scale (2019)

School heads with minimum qualifications in lower secondary general programmes



Note: The category "required if necessary" indicates cases where school heads can be exempted from teaching duty under certain conditions (i.e. the minimum teaching time requirement is 0 hours).

Source: OECD (2020^[4]), Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

Most countries where school heads are required to teach do not set a specific number of teaching hours but rather define minimum and/or maximum teaching hours. In a majority of countries, the number of teaching hours required from school heads falls as the level of education increases, as it does for teachers. However, they are not expected to fulfil the same teaching load as teachers. For example, in lower secondary general programmes, their maximum statutory annual teaching requirement is between 28% and 87% of the requirement for teachers in their country or economy. The teaching hours required from a school head often vary depending on the size of the school (number of students, teachers and/or classes). Typically, the larger the school, the less time school heads are required to teach. The geographical location or the socio-economic status of the region may also influence teaching time requirements (as in Australia and Ireland).

In all countries, the COVID-19 crisis brought dramatic changes to students' learning environments, which may have resulted in additional workload for schools heads, such as organising resources for remote learning during school closures and co-ordinating with health authorities over school re-openings.

School heads earn more than teachers ...

In 2019, school heads' actual salaries are on average 59% higher than teachers' at lower secondary level. The differences in actual salaries between teachers and school heads tend to increase with the level of education. School heads also typically earn more than tertiary-educated workers. Relative to the earnings of full-time, full-year workers with tertiary education, primary school heads earn 26% more, lower secondary school heads earn 38% more and upper secondary school heads earn 46% more on average across OECD countries and economies.

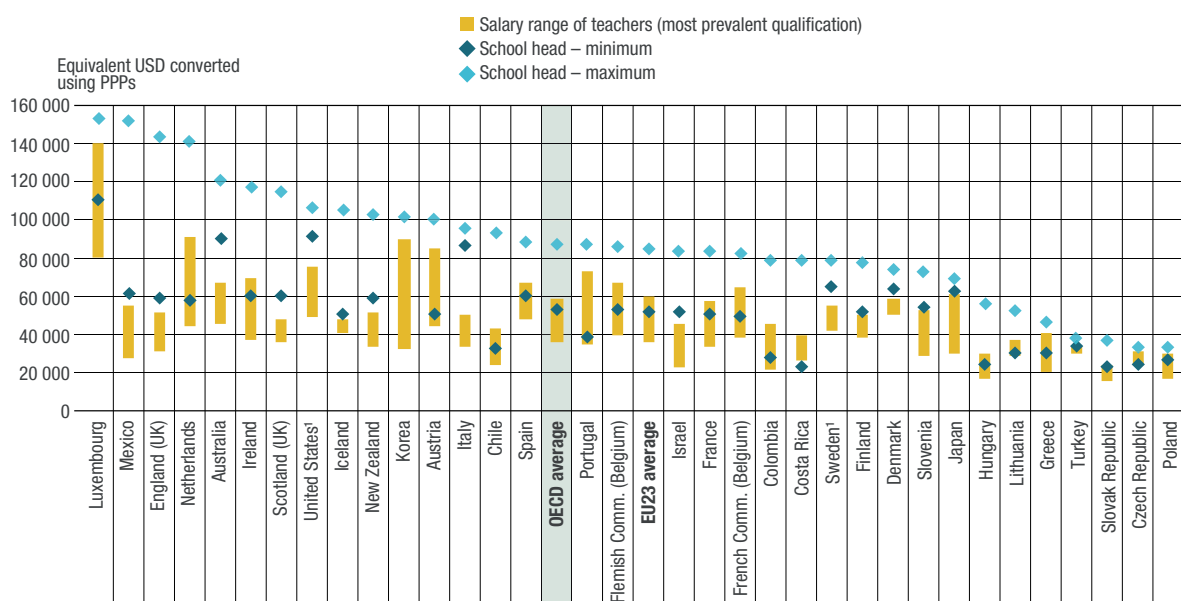
The average actual salary premium of school heads over teachers vary widely across countries. For example, at lower secondary level, the average premium exceeds 100% in England (United Kingdom) (136%) and Italy (160%), while it is below 50% in 14 out of the 26 OECD countries with data, with the lowest in Estonia (20%).

Actual salary of school heads are determined by salary scales, allowances for certain tasks and responsibilities, and allowances for working conditions. In most countries, school heads' salaries and allowances in public institutions are decided at central or state level. However, in some countries a collective agreement applies (e.g. Finland, Norway and Denmark) or multiple levels of authorities are involved (Brazil, Italy and the United States).

Statutory salary ranges contribute to explain salary premium over teachers in most countries. For example, at lower secondary level, school heads (with minimum qualifications) in Italy are guaranteed higher base salaries than teachers, while the salary differential between school heads and teachers is small in Turkey (Figure 2). In about half of OECD countries and economies, the pay ranges (difference between minimum and maximum statutory salaries) for primary and lower secondary school heads are similar, while upper secondary school heads benefit from higher statutory salaries on average. However, the minimum and maximum statutory salaries should be interpreted with caution, as they apply to school heads in different types and sizes of schools and the distribution of school heads between the minimum and maximum salaries is not available.

Figure 2. Minimum and maximum statutory salaries for lower secondary teachers and school heads (2019)

Teachers with most prevalent qualifications at the lower secondary level and school heads with minimum qualifications



1. Actual base salaries.

Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of maximum salaries of school heads.

Source: OECD (2020^[4]) Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators, <https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en>.

School heads' actual salaries also vary according to their individual characteristics, such as the duties they have to perform and their number of years of experience. In more than one-third of OECD countries and economies, school heads receive additional payments for working in disadvantaged, remote or high-cost areas and/or for outstanding performance, just as teachers do.

However, in many countries school heads are not paid for working longer than their statutory working hours. At lower secondary level, only eight countries provide some financial compensation to school heads for additional hours worked.

How the pandemic will influence actual salary level of school heads is uncertain. However, if school heads work more hours for similar pay as in previous years, then their satisfaction with their salaries could be the more important issue.

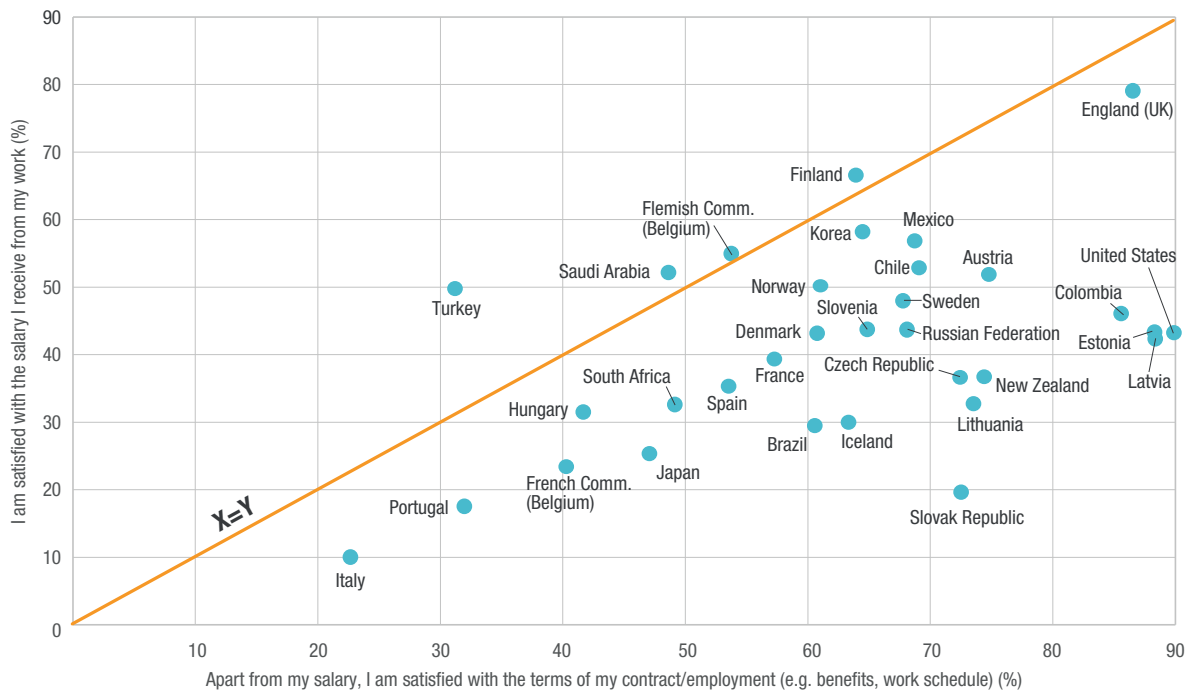
... But less than half are satisfied with their salaries

On average across the 30 OECD countries in TALIS 2018, 64% of school heads in public institutions are satisfied with the terms of their contract/employment, and only 42% are satisfied with the salary that they receive. This trend is true in many OECD and partner countries (Figure 3).

On average across the OECD countries participating in TALIS 2018, 71% of school heads in public institutions report administrative work as a source of "quite a bit" or "a lot" of stress. About half of the school heads (in public and private institutions) also reported the following tasks as sources of stress: keeping up with changing requirements from local, municipal/regional, state or national/federal authorities (55%); being held responsible for students' achievement (46%); and addressing parents' or guardians' concerns (47%).

Figure 3. School heads' satisfaction with salary and the terms of their contract/employment (2018)

Lower secondary school heads in public institutions in OECD and partner countries and economies



Note: Values represent the percentage of school heads in public institutions who «agree» or «strongly agree» to each statement.
Source: OECD (2020^[2]), TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals, <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>.

The bottom line

School heads in public institutions are required to work on average 7-8 hours a day, as is the case for most office-based jobs. The hours worked and the list of tasks and responsibilities vary widely across countries. On average across OECD countries, they earn more than teachers and other full-time tertiary-educated workers. However, more than half of school heads in the OECD countries are not satisfied with their salary and feel quite stressed due to heavy administrative workloads and responsibilities other than leadership and management.

NOTE :

1. Some data in this text are based on the OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018, which surveyed teachers and school principals in 48 countries worldwide. The TALIS report refers to “principals in publicly managed schools” while *Education at a Glance* uses “school heads in public institutions (with minimum qualification)”. For ease of reading, this document refers to “school heads in public institutions” throughout.

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- [1] OECD (2018), *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en>.
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- [2] OECD (2020), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>.
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