



Ambasáid na hÉireann
Embassy of Ireland

IRISH TEACHER SURVEY REPORT

A SHORT REPORT ON THE FINDINGS OF AN IRISH EMBASSY
SURVEY OF IRISH TEACHERS LIVING AND WORKING IN THE
UNITED ARAB EMIRATES, QATAR AND KUWAIT



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Irish Teacher Survey

1. Introduction

In May 2019, the Embassy of Ireland in Abu Dhabi carried out an online survey of the Irish teaching community in the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait. It is estimated that there are some 3,500 Irish teachers living and working in our Gulf countries of accreditation – the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait, with the majority of those working in the UAE. In the context of *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Policy*, the Embassy had identified a need to build a comprehensive profile of this very significant community in order to better connect with them during their time in the Middle East. The survey was conducted between the 5th and 25th of May 2019, and there were 1,002 responses.

2. Executive Summary

The results indicate that Irish teachers in the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait are young, highly qualified, transient, and very well connected to home and to each other. A very substantial majority obtained their teaching qualification in Ireland. Most respondents had significant postgraduate teaching experience prior to moving to the Middle East. Financial reasons are the by far the most common motivation for moving to the Gulf. Just over half of the respondents plan on returning to Ireland to teach, with 10% not so intending, the remainder being undecided. Of those planning to return, most plan to spend up to 5 years working in the Gulf before returning to Ireland.

The results of the survey are very instructive and will be used by the Irish Embassy to focus engagement with this important community. The results will be shared with the Department of Education and Skills in advance of the visit to the UAE by Minister for Education and Skills, Mr Joe McHugh TD, in June 2019.

3. Summary of results

The survey was conducted online, published on the Embassy of Ireland UAE website, and distributed primarily on social media channels, including Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter. Irish communities and groups including the GAA, Irish societies and the Irish Business Network Dubai promoted the survey amongst their members and on social media between May 5th and 25th, 2019.

Of the 1002 responses:

- 69% of respondents were female.
- 76% were aged between 25 and 34.
- 90% resided in the UAE, 8% in Qatar and 2% in Kuwait. Dubai was the most common location (42%), followed by Abu Dhabi (30%) and Al Ain (8%).
- 59% have lived in the Gulf for less than 3 years, while 25% have lived there for 3 to 5 years.
- 76% had moved to the Gulf from Ireland, while 17% were living in the UK prior to moving.
- 76% said they moved to the Gulf for financial opportunities, followed by lifestyle change (40%), unemployment/underemployment in Ireland (35%) and career development (30%).

- 22% were married and 13% had children.
- 56% were teaching primary level and approximately 30% said they were post primary teachers.
- 59% had a post graduate qualification.
- 91% had a teaching qualification.
- 73% obtained their teaching qualification in Ireland.
- 85% of those that obtained their teaching qualification elsewhere are recognised/registered teachers in their country of qualification.
- Bachelor of Education was the most common qualification (39%), followed by PCGE (UK) (22%) and Higher Diploma in Education (13%). Almost 20% had a Master's degree.
- 80% were registered with or eligible to be registered with the Teaching Council of Ireland. 12% said they were not eligible and 8% don't know.
- 83% had post qualification teaching experience prior to moving to the Gulf. 67% had gained their experience in Ireland and 26% in the UK.
- 10% had less than one year's teaching experience, while 46% had more than 5 years.
- 27% were on a career break from an Irish school or institution.
- 98% were currently working as teachers.
- 93% said they would recommend a career as a teacher in the Gulf to others.
- 86% said that the quality of life is better in the Gulf than in Ireland.
- 62% had been working in the Gulf for less than 3 years.
- 85% were teaching in an international private school.
- 55% applied for their job directly to the school/institution, while 37% used a third party recruitment agency. Only 3% said they were recruited at a graduate recruitment fair.
- 56% plan to return to teach in Ireland, and 33% don't know. 45% said they plan to return to teach in Ireland within 3 years.
- Salary was the most commonly identified barrier to returning to teach in Ireland (74%), followed by pay inequality for post-2011 entrants (69%), housing (62%) and lack of permanent teaching positions (58%).
- 88% said they were aware of websites advertising teaching posts in Ireland. 22% said they were aware of the Department of Education and Skills' 'Teaching Transforms' programme.
- 66% said they keep up to date with developments in the education sector in Ireland.
- 90% used Facebook, 86% used Instagram and 57% used Snapchat.
- 78% were involved with Irish community groups in the Gulf, of which 80% said they were members of a GAA club. 35% were members of an Irish society, and only 8% were members of an Irish business or professional network.
- 19% had consulted the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Travel Advice and 10% had registered their location in the Gulf on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Citizens' Registration.
- 30% had engaged with the Irish Embassy over the past 3 years, predominately for passport services.

4. About the Process

The survey was conducted online between the 5th and 25th May 2019. It was advertised on the Embassy of Ireland's website and through our social media networks. Irish community organisations in the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait were asked to promote it to their members. There were 55 questions in total on background, education, work, connection with Ireland and engagement with the Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi. The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

5. Detail of Report

5.1 Baseline data

There were 1,002 responses. 69% of the respondents were female. As expected, respondents were young, with 83% aged 34 or under and only 3% aged 45 or older.

Almost 90% of respondents were living in the United Arab Emirates, while 8% were in Qatar and 2% in Kuwait. Dubai was the most popular location (42%), followed by Abu Dhabi (30%) and Al Ain (8%). 59% had been living in the Middle East for less than 3 years.

76% had moved to the Middle East from Ireland, while 17% were living in the UK prior to moving to the Gulf. Small numbers had lived elsewhere in the Middle East, Asia and the US.

Financial opportunities emerged as the overwhelming motivation for teachers to move to the Middle East (76%), followed by lifestyle change (40%), unemployment/underemployment in Ireland (35%) and career development (30%). The 11% who selected 'Other' gave reasons such as the desire to travel, the cost of living in Ireland, particularly in Dublin, the lack of affordable housing, and the salary scale for post-2011 entrants.

22% of respondents were married and the majority (87%) did not have children.

5.2 Education and Qualifications

As anticipated, teachers are extremely well qualified. 58% had a postgraduate qualification.

91% of respondents had a teaching qualification. 39% had a Bachelor of Education, and 22% completed the PGCE in the UK. Almost 20% had a Master's degree, significantly higher than the average population in Ireland.¹

73% of respondents completed their teaching qualification in Ireland. Of those who did not qualify in Ireland, 85% are recognised/registered teachers in the country where they studied to become a teacher.

Almost a third of respondents are qualified post-primary teachers. Their subject qualifications span all disciplines, including Irish and modern languages.

80% of respondents said they are registered with or eligible to be registered with the Irish Teaching Council. However, there were a number of comments about the difficulties faced by

¹ Source: OECD Education <https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/>

teachers trying to register from abroad. Of teachers who qualified outside Ireland, only 46% said they were registered with or eligible to be registered with the Teaching Council. 32% said they weren't eligible and 22% didn't know.

83% of respondents had post-qualification teaching experience prior to moving abroad, mainly in Ireland (67%). 46% of respondents had greater than 5 years of teaching experience.

27% of respondents are currently on a career break from an Irish school or institution.

5.3 Work

98% are currently working as teachers. The other 2% predominantly work in other areas of education, such as recruitment or advisory roles, and a small number are working in the home.

Almost half have been working as a teacher in the Gulf for one to three years. 56% are teaching at primary level, 30% at secondary level and 9% are working in early years' education. 85% are teaching in international private schools.

93% would recommend a career as a teacher in the Gulf to others.

56% plan on returning to teach in Ireland and 34% don't know. Of teachers who responded who had qualified outside Ireland, 45% intend to return to teach in Ireland in the next three years, and 42% said they do not know if or when they will return.

Salary was the principal barrier to return for 74% of respondents, followed by pay inequality for post-2011 entrants, housing and lack of permanent teaching positions. Many mentioned the better pay and conditions they enjoy abroad, including an accommodation allowance and no tax.

Qualifications and Teaching Council registration were not ranked as major barriers by most respondents. However, many comments outlined difficulties in transferring qualifications and the registration process. Some mentioned giving PCGE (UK) graduates the opportunity to earn their Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in Ireland and others mentioned making it easier for Northern Ireland-qualified teachers to register with the Teaching Council. Many noted that it is difficult, expensive and time consuming to register with the Teaching Council from abroad.

Non-recognition of teaching experience in private schools outside the EU was an issue for many, particularly post primary teachers who mentioned the recognition of their experience abroad for increment purposes.

The lack of affordable housing in Ireland and difficulties in securing a mortgage were raised by many respondents. Comments about securing a mortgage were often related to the lack of permanent teaching positions.

Respondents commented on the lack of career progression in teaching in Ireland, and the lack of leadership positions in primary schools. A few mentioned severe pressures faced by school principals in Ireland.

740 (74%) respondents outlined suggestions for incentives to encourage people to return. Pay restoration and salary increases were most frequently mentioned, as well as measures to make the cost of living, particularly housing, more affordable. There were suggestions of a 'Dublin allowance', similar to the London allowance.

Changes to recruitment processes and contracts featured strongly. There were suggestions to abolish the panel system and to allow more mobility to move to another school or location. There were suggestions to streamline interview processes, rather than applying individually to different schools. Many requested more transparency and more information on job opportunities.

Recognition of international experience for increment purposes for post primary teachers featured strongly again.

5.4 Connection with Ireland

The connection with Ireland is very strong, with 98% keeping up to date with Irish news and events, mostly via news apps and websites, social media and family and friends. 66% keep up to date with changes in the education sector in Ireland. Many said they use social media to keep up to date with educational developments in Ireland, and some said they continue to be members of the INTO.

86% say that the quality of life is better in the Gulf than in Ireland. 10% say it's about the same and only 4% say it is worse.

Teachers say that their students' awareness of Ireland is low, with only 11% saying their students have a good awareness of Ireland. Suggestions for improving this include exchange programmes and linkages between Irish schools and schools in the Middle East. There were also suggestions of offering the Irish curriculum and establishing an Irish curriculum school in the Middle East. An Irish cultural centre was suggested by one respondent.

Of the 53% of respondents that said they used social media, 90% use Facebook, 86% use Instagram and 57% use Snapchat. Twitter and LinkedIn are less popular, used by 36% and 29% respectively.

78% are involved with Irish community organisations in the Gulf. For over three-quarters of respondents, this is a GAA club. 35% are members of an Irish society, and 8% are in an Irish business or professional network. Others said they are in Irish parents' groups or music groups. Some said they have groups of Irish friends or colleagues and a few mention membership of Irish Facebook groups.

5.5 Interaction with the Irish Embassy

Over a third of respondents were aware of the services offered by the Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi. 29% had engaged with the Embassy in the last three years. Of those who responded, 71% said their engagement was with the Embassy in Abu Dhabi, and 39% with the Embassy office in Dubai. 171 respondents had required passport services, while 116 respondents had engaged with the Embassy for consular services, including the authentication of documents. 17 respondents said they had required emergency assistance.

Just under 20% said they had consulted the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Travel Advice, and 10% had registered their location in the Middle East on Citizens' Registration.

6. Conclusion

With over 1,000 responses, it is clear that Irish teachers here are very engaged with and keen to give their views on challenges facing the teaching profession. Respondents were very clear about what they see as the challenges facing them in Ireland - salary, pay inequality, accommodation and a shortage of permanent positions - but there was also general positivity about the value of working abroad, both professionally and personally. All in all, working in the UAE and in the Gulf region seems to be regarded as being a positive experience by most teachers. That said, a majority are likely to return to Ireland at some stage to live and work, with most feeling that they will be better teachers for their time here. One notable aspect is the phenomenal reach of the GAA across the Gulf, with 80% of respondents indicating that they were involved with the GAA. The strength and level of engagement of the wider Irish community here is reflected both in the response to the survey and in the assistance of the different organisations and individuals. Thank you to all of you who helped and to those who took the time to complete the survey and to share their feedback and ideas with us.

6.1 Acknowledgments

We wish to thank –

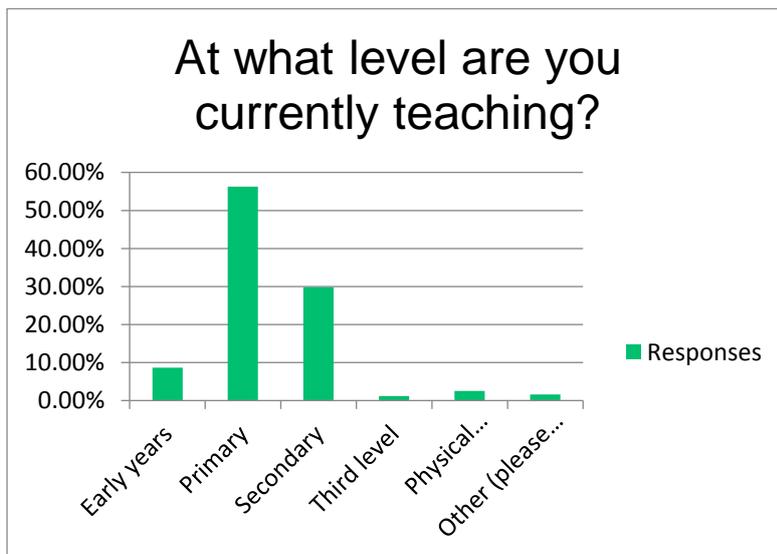
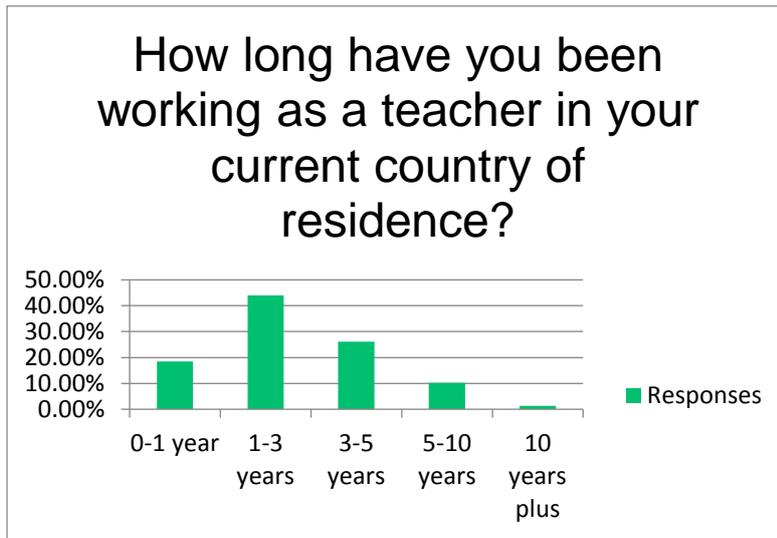
GAA Clubs in the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait
Abu Dhabi Irish Society
Abu Dhabi Irish Business Council
Abu Dhabi Paddy
Dubai Irish Society
Irish Business Network Dubai
Qatar Irish Society

And individual members of the Irish community in the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait for extending themselves to assist us in compiling the survey, promoting it, and encouraging responses.

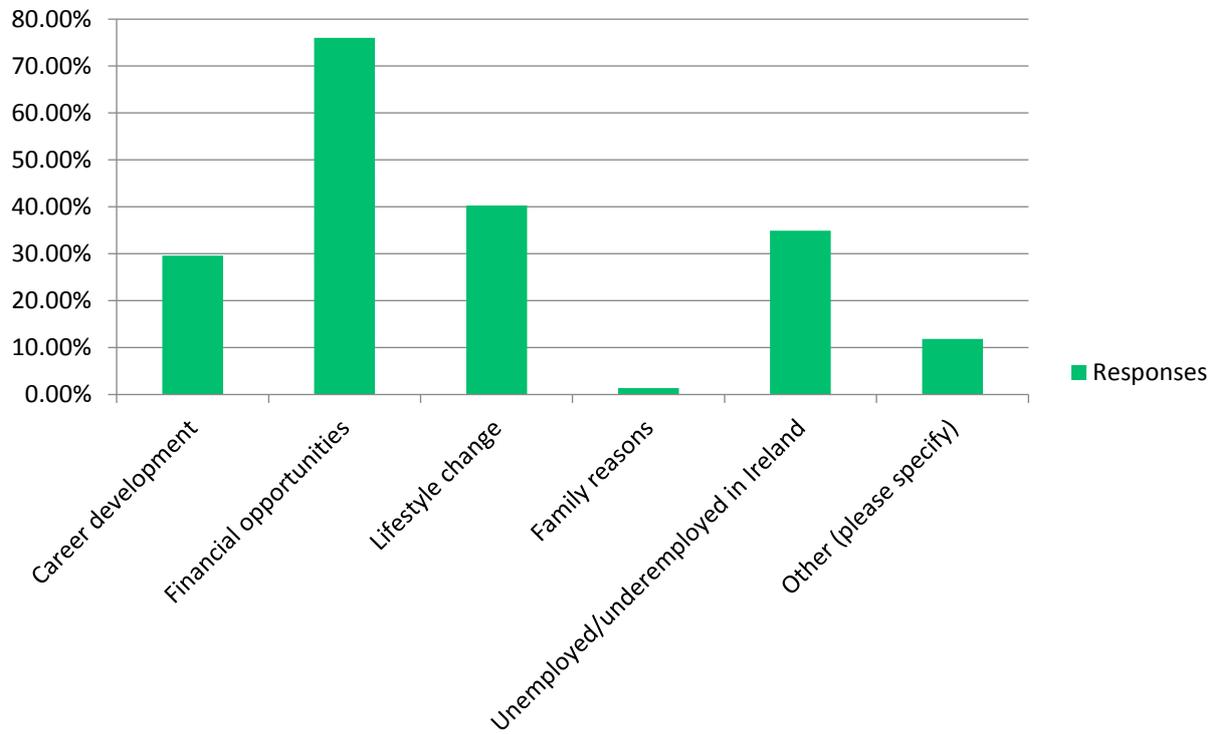
Embassy of Ireland, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

June 2019

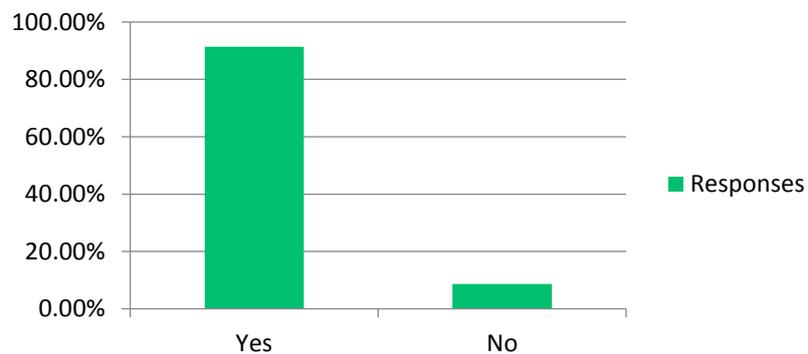
Appendix I: Key Findings

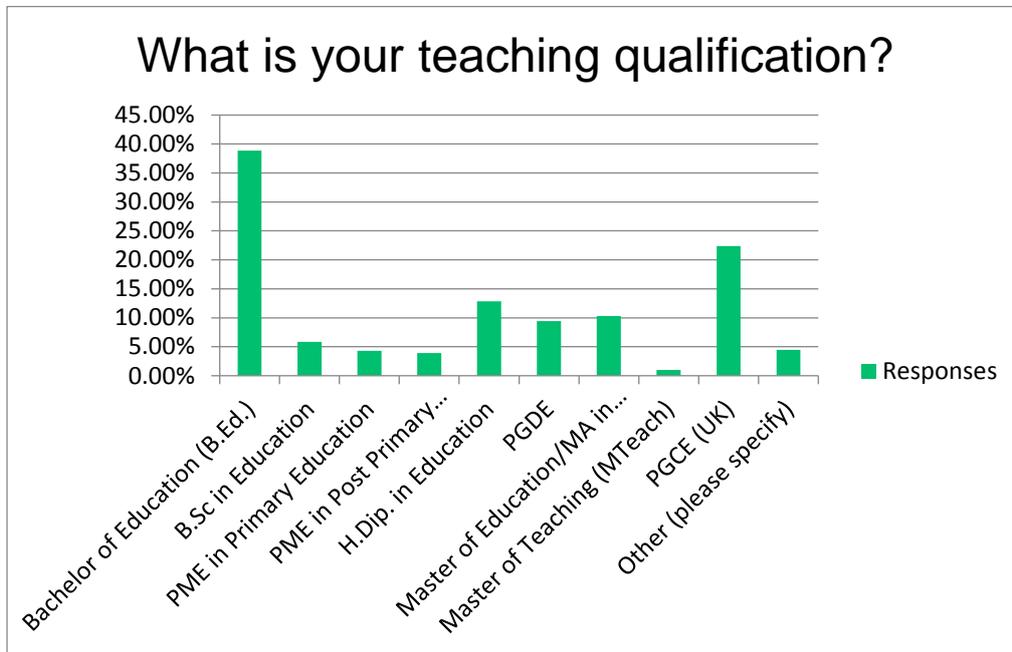
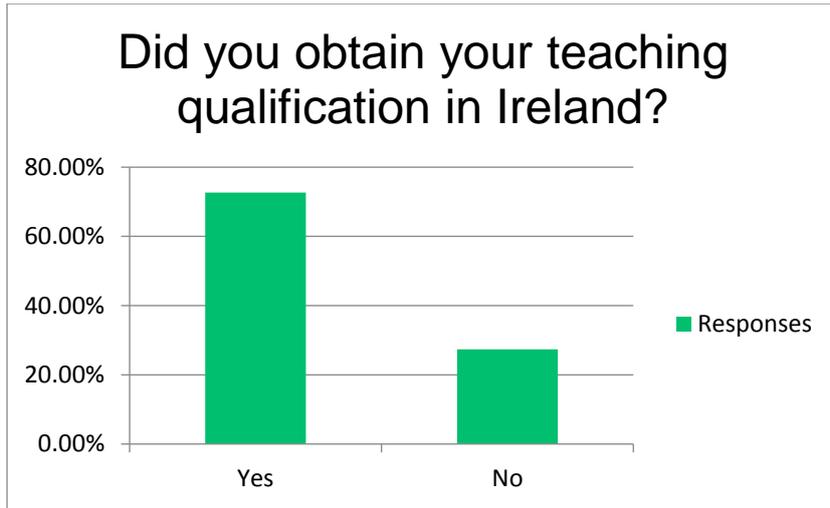


Which best describes your reasons for leaving Ireland? Select all that apply

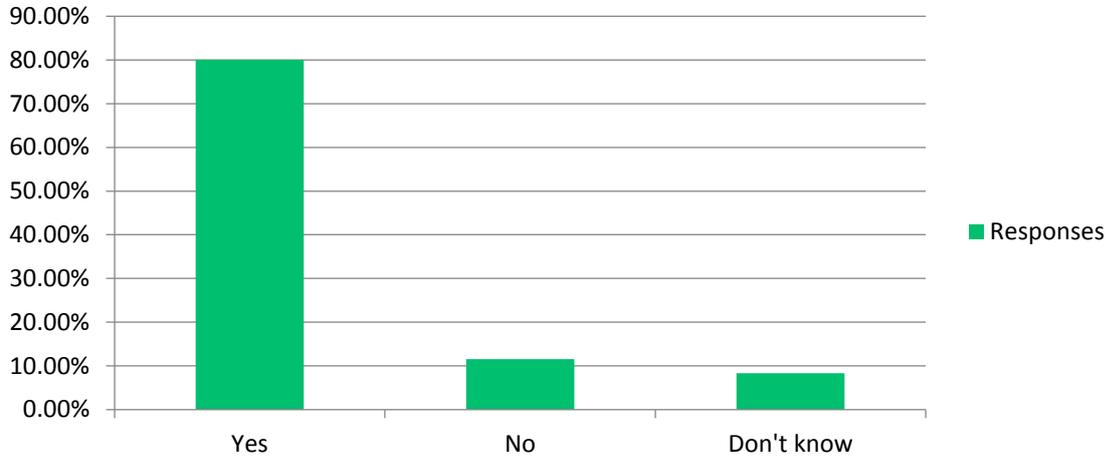


Do you have a teaching qualification?

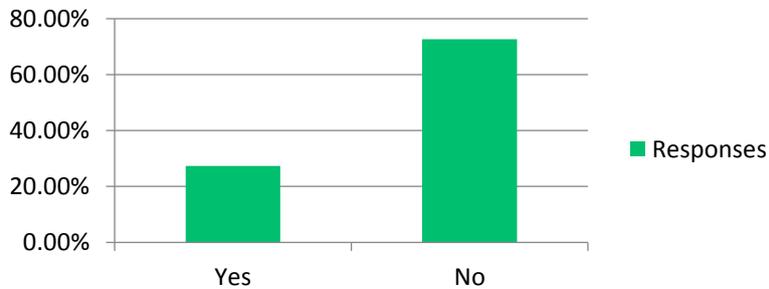




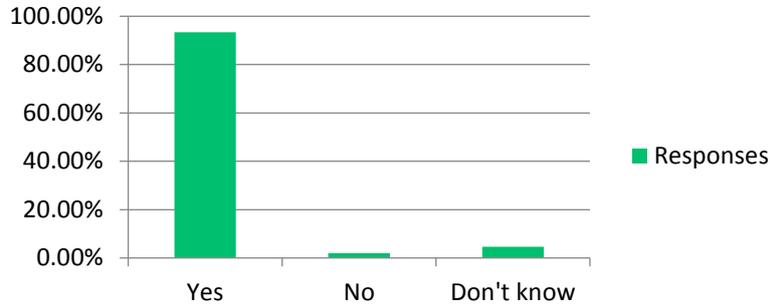
Are you registered/eligible to be registered with the Irish Teaching Council?



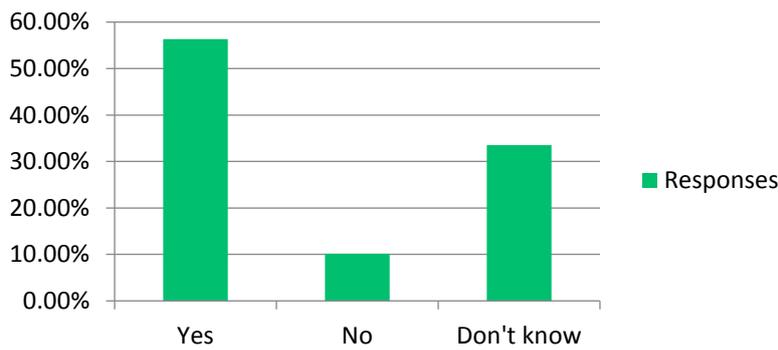
Are you currently on a career break from an Irish school/institution?



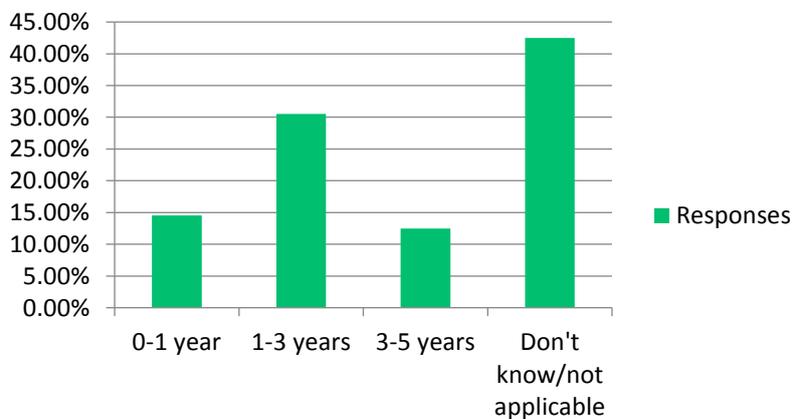
Would you recommend a career as a teacher in the Gulf to others?



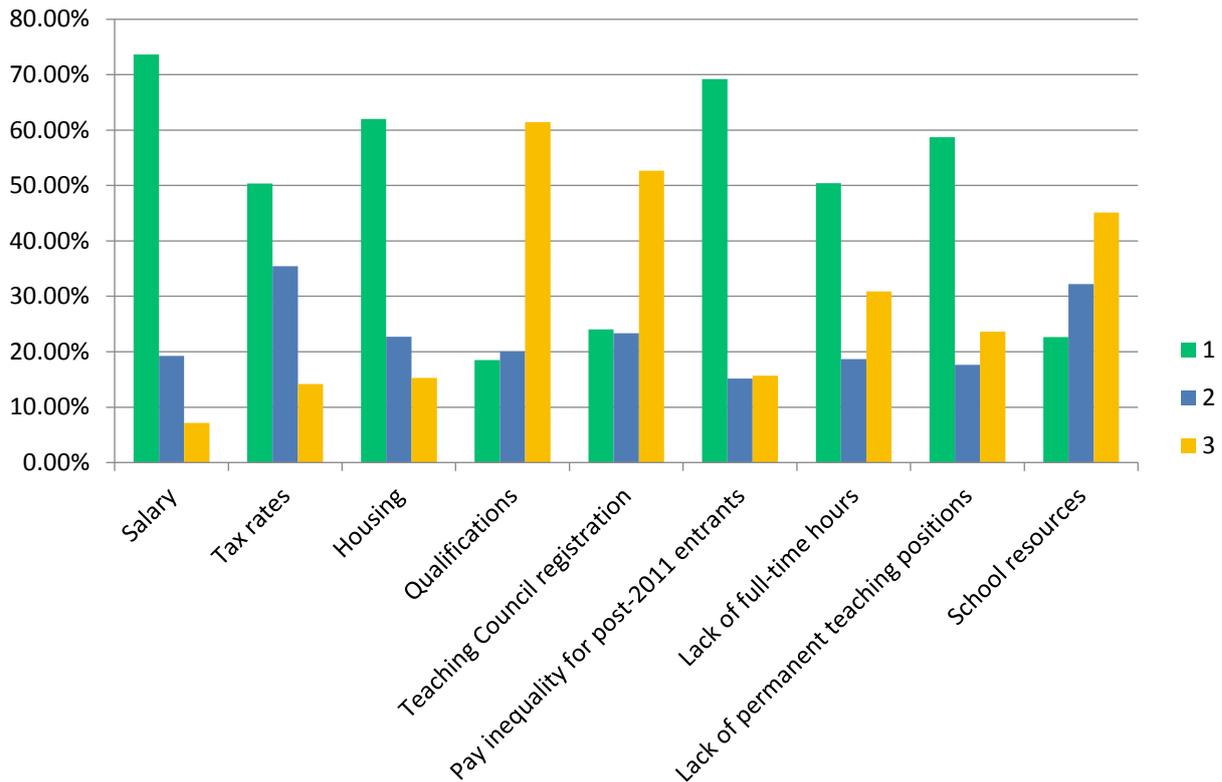
Do you plan to return to teach in Ireland?



If so, when do you plan to return to teach in Ireland?



What do you see as the primary barriers for you returning to teach in Ireland? Rank from 1-3 in order of importance to you with 1 being the most important and 3 being least important



How would you rate the quality of life in your country of residence compared to Ireland?

