

# THE EDVECTUS INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL RECRUITMENT REPORT

**EAST ASIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA AND MIDDLE EAST**

November 2021

**DESIGNED BY**

Edvectus

**SUPPORTED BY**

International Education  
Solutions (IES)



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# Executive Summary

A survey of over 200 international schools in the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions indicates 2022 will be the most challenging year for international staff recruitment ever. 40% of schools anticipate hiring more teachers than the last pre-pandemic recruitment season, a figure that rises to 50% for schools in the Middle East.

A majority of schools anticipate it will be harder or much harder to find these teachers, with Secondary specialists and STEM teachers being the most difficult to find. Impediments include inability to travel, Covid vaccinations required, staff wanting to return home, and difficulty obtaining visas for teachers and dependants. Most schools have reacted by recruiting earlier, speeding up the recruitment process, and trying to retain staff by offering more contractual flexibility. It remains to be seen if these efforts will be enough.

A survey of over

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Difficulty finding teachers, especially  
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teachers, will continue to increase



The global pandemic has affected most aspects of international school life, from teaching online to border closures, which have also affected staff hiring and deployment. In light of this disruption, Edvectus conducted a survey in October 2021 to evaluate the recruitment landscape for 2022 jobs.

The survey was designed by Edvectus with the support of International Education Solutions (IES), and a number of experienced international school leaders. The survey was completed by over 200 international heads of school, HR directors and school owners in the Asia Pacific and Middle East regions. These regions include two countries with the highest number of British and American orientated international schools – the UAE and China.

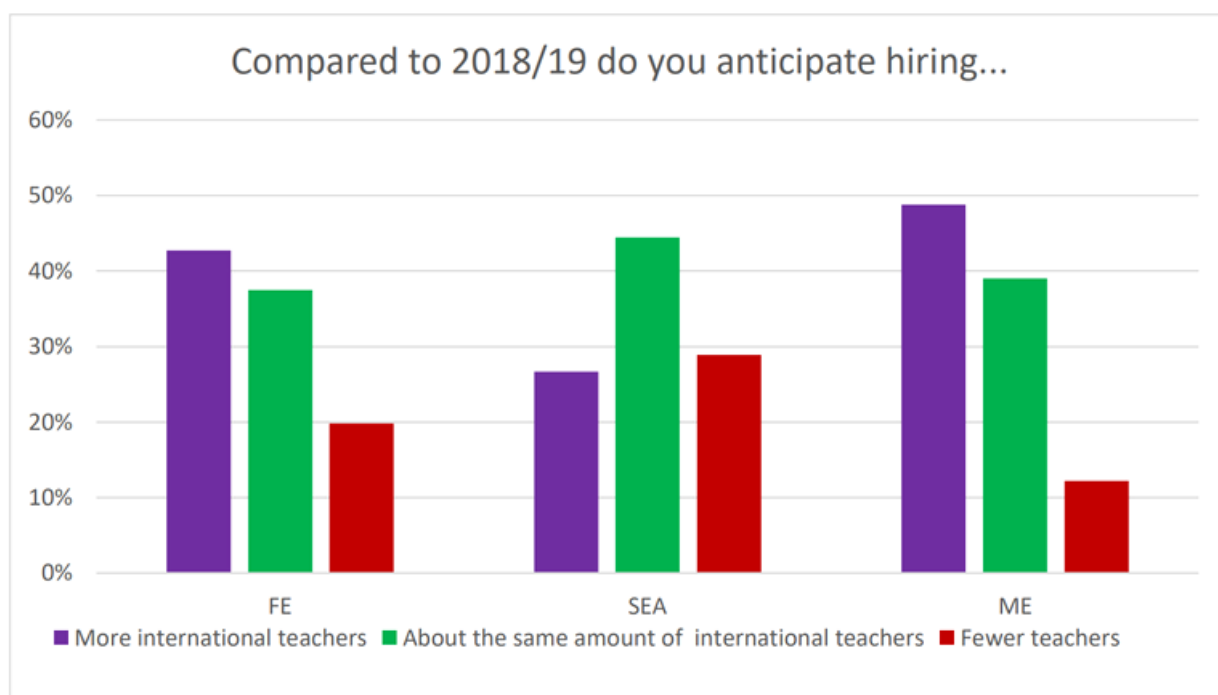


## How many international teachers will be needed, and how difficult will it be to source them?

It is well-established that the number of international school teachers was not keeping pace with the demand from international schools before the pandemic, and that the pandemic has further reduced the supply of teachers with many unwilling or unable to move outside of their current country. Edvectus data indicates that new applications from qualified teachers in key source countries such as the US, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland are down more than 20% compared to 2020, and 2020 numbers were lower than 2019. Now with many destination countries in Asia Pacific and the Middle East slowly opening borders and parents getting used to the “new normal” of the post – pandemic world, we examine the demand for international teachers, using the last pre-pandemic recruitment season of 2018-19 as a frame of reference.



The survey results indicate the number of teachers needed by international schools will be greater in 2022 compared to the last pre-pandemic recruitment season. The average international school in the survey plans to hire at least 21 international teachers for the next academic year. Overall, 40% of the respondents said they anticipate hiring more new international teachers than in the last pre-Covid recruitment season which was 2018-19. 40% of respondents said they will hire about the same amount as pre-pandemic, but only 20% felt they would hire fewer. The mismatch between supply of and demand for international teachers seems set to widen again, to an all-time high.



# Regional Variation

Every country has a different political, demographic and economic landscape that affects the demand-side equation. In the Middle East (ME), where online teaching was the norm in the 2020-21 school year, many jobs were cut and hiring was limited as schools tried to balance the economics of tuition cuts that were either government mandated or demanded by parents. As of Autumn 2021 schools have all been allowed back in person full time, and wide-spread vaccinations mean that more teachers are needed going forward to backfill those laid off during 2020, natural attrition as well as school growth.

In the East Asia (FE) schools including many schools in China, staffing efforts have been thwarted by fully closed or semi-closed borders. Very few expatriate teachers hired outside of China between 2019 and 2020 made it through the slow immigration process forcing most schools in China into bidding wars for teachers already in China who were willing to stay. Teachers were encouraged to stay in China for their summer holidays in 2020 to avoid being caught on the wrong side of the uncertain border before the new school year. Now, two years on, many have had enough.

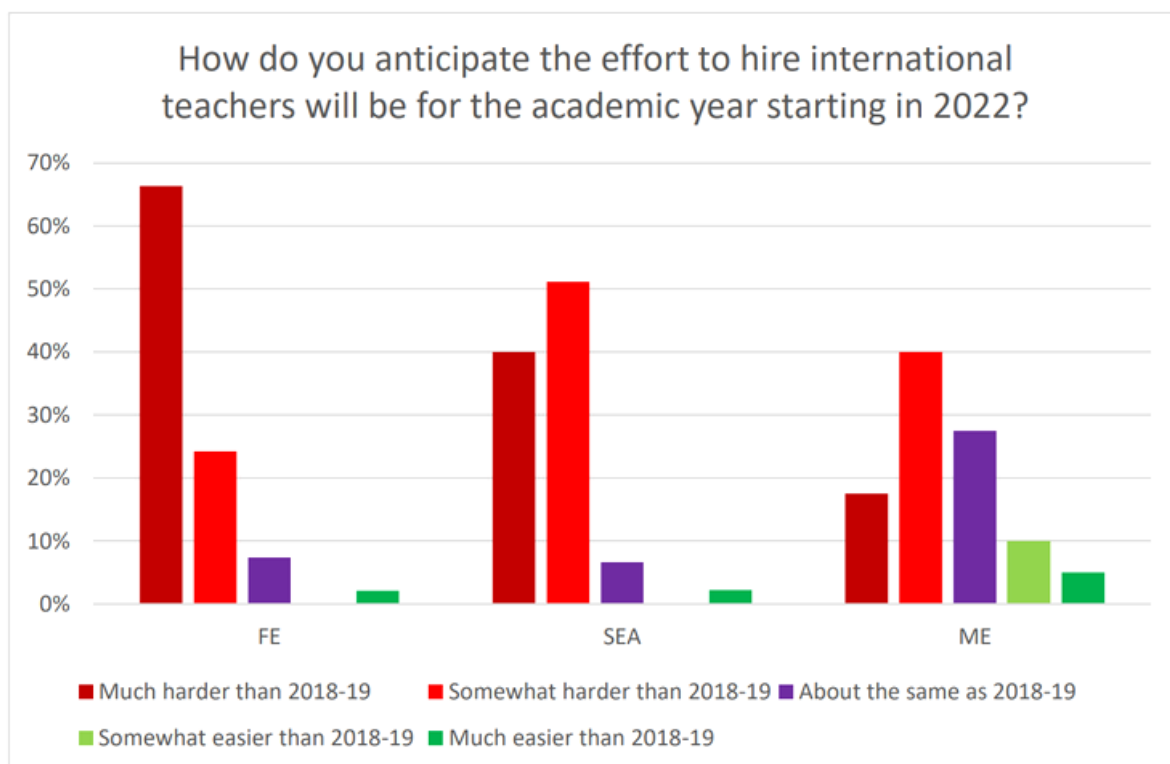




Our internal data indicates 20-30% of teachers already teaching in China do not intend to remain in China for 2022-3 resulting in a potential net loss of hundreds if not thousands of teachers which must be filled from outside the country. With continuing visa processing delays, lack of dependent visas, requirements for jobs to be filled by teachers from a handful of 'native English speaking' countries, quarantines of up to 4 weeks upon arrival and new taxes on benefits for foreigners, the landscape for replacing those teachers is indeed bleak when the very same teachers can easily go to a different region, such as the Middle East, that has few impediments and an even higher appetite for hiring. Comparatively, South East Asian (SEA) hiring managers have a more conservative hiring mind-set, possibly driven by the potential economic uncertainty created by a lack of tourism hitting the finances of many fee-paying parents. SEA schools anticipate the least hiring, roughly equivalent to the last pre-pandemic year.

## How difficult will it be to find the right teachers?

More international teachers are needed, but how much effort will schools have to dedicate to sourcing them? The vast majority of schools surveyed expect finding these international teachers will be difficult this year. 82% of respondents felt it would be "somewhat harder" or "much harder" than the 2018/19 recruitment season. Only 5% felt it would be easier.



The perceived magnitude of the challenge varies by region. Unsurprisingly, schools in China and East Asia expect the most difficulties, whereas the Middle East schools, where borders have been more consistently open for longer, are more optimistic that they can get the teachers they need.

That is not to say it will be easy for even Middle East schools. “Both the number of quality of applications have been less”, wrote one Middle East school. “We need to consider their location and work harder to obtain their working visa. Traveling these days is getting tougher due to lockdown in different countries and candidates must show proof of Covid vaccinations.” wrote a Southeast Asian school, and this was a sentiment echoed by other schools in the Asia Pacific.



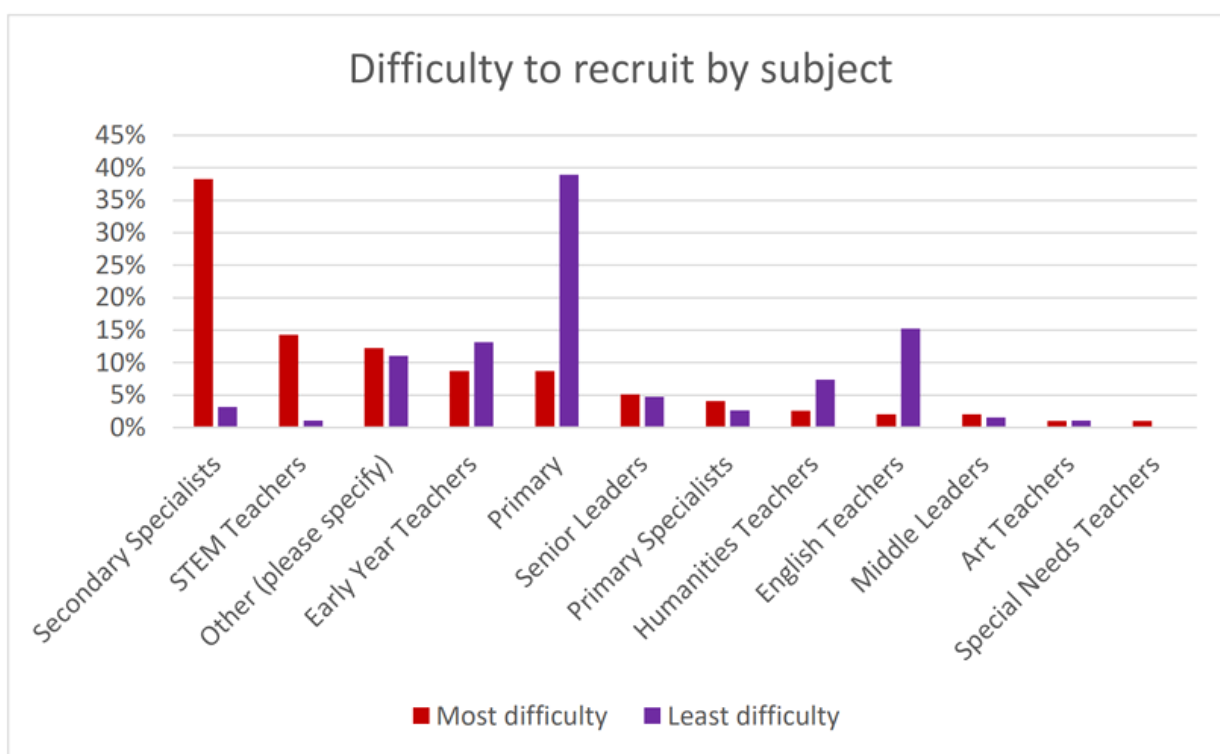
Schools may be forced to compromise on other standards to employ teachers they can realistically get into their country.

The subject and level of the teacher will also determine the difficulty in finding them. Secondary teachers, particularly STEM teachers, are perceived as more difficult to find than Primary, Early Years, English and Humanities teachers. The ‘Other’ responses included “all of them”, “so-called native English speaking teachers” and specialists like “Music Teachers”.



The particular challenge in recruiting secondary STEM teachers has been a decade-long problem as graduates with STEM degrees are lured into industry with the lure of higher pay and better working conditions. (2) Covid has not changed the dynamics of the situation.





## What is causing the disruption to normal recruitment patterns?

Country-wide and regional border closures, either hard closures precluding travel or the closure of embassies that would normally process visas, is by far the main impact on business as usual recruitment. Forty-eight percent of respondents named this as the single biggest factor impacting their efforts. International travel is not as simple as it used to be, which has disrupted the usual in-person recruitment efforts, whether large job fairs, smaller bespoke events and one-off interviews run by individual schools and organisations. The inability of easy travel has also impacted staff retention, as evidenced by the large number of respondents citing teachers wanting to return home as the biggest factor (15%), and difficulty arranging visas and work permits (7%). Other impacts are financial incentives for teachers such as decreasing salary, tax and benefits packages. Finally economic uncertainty and an inability to accurately estimate enrolment and staffing needs is also a concern.



Respondents cited teachers wanting to return home



Experienced difficulty arranging visas and work permits

The answers were mostly consistent across the regions with a few exceptions. 15% of schools in Southeast Asia felt that the economic uncertainty was the most pressing factor causing change, but this factor was not echoed as an outstanding factor in other regions. Lower salary and benefits compared to other regions and vaccine mandates were identified by 12% of Middle Eastern schools as a key factor, but by very few in other regions.

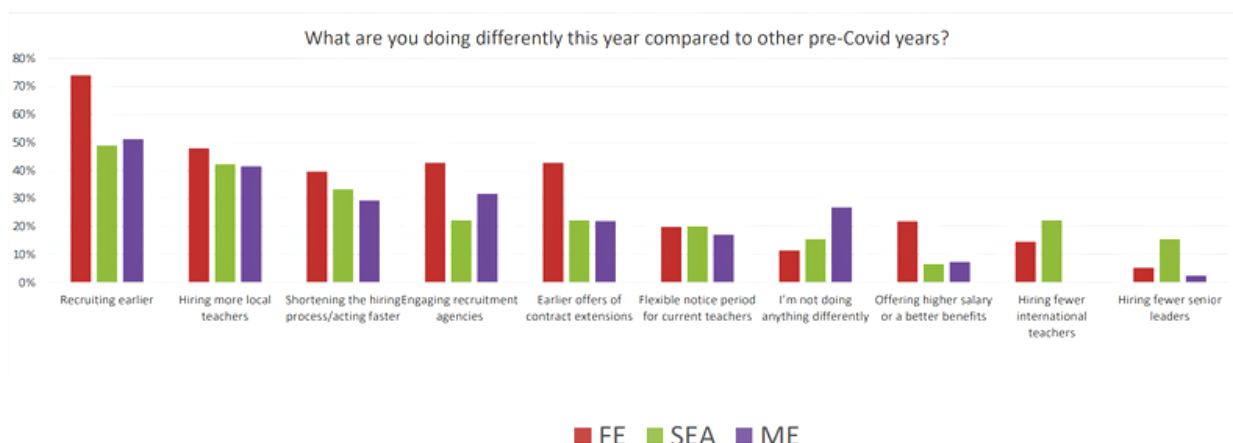
## Reacting to the challenge– what are schools going to do differently?

Adaptability and proactivity are pre-requisite skills for most international school leaders, particularly in Asia where the economic, political and demographic landscape has changed dramatically in the past 20 years. When asked 'What are you doing differently' it's not surprising that school leaders were trying a variety of tactics in an uncertain environment.

Recruiting earlier was the most popular tactic being employed, with almost three quarters of schools in East Asia using this tactic. Recruiting earlier is only possible if a school knows their vacancies earlier, and if teachers of sufficient quality and quantity are available at an earlier time.

More than 30% of schools are hiring more local teachers, which is to the benefit of highly skilled local teachers who might not previously have been considered. Many schools that hire local teachers are worried about "What will fee-paying parents think?", and will be forced to differentiate themselves on a basis other than the nationality of their teaching staff. The increasing number of PGCEi type training programmes, aimed at upskilling the host national workforce, has been a timely benefit with closed borders.





Schools are also being more flexible with many aspects of recruitment and retention. Approximately 30% of schools are engaging recruitment companies in a way they did not previously, and 30% are shortening the hiring process and/or acting faster. A significant percentage are offering more contractual flexibility to their existing staff, such as flexible notice periods and earlier contract extensions. Schools have realised that keeping the staff they have is less risky than losing them in a challenging market. One school in China noted that their strategy was an “intense focus on retention of existing staff”, and another said they were, “Looking sooner, only inside China first and trying to retain as many as possible”.

Only a handful of schools are not doing anything differently and those were more likely to be located in the Middle East. The Middle East region does have more relaxed Covid border policies in key countries such as the UAE, where teachers who are fully vaccinated can move freely in and out of the country without quarantine. However, it remains to be seen if their higher than normal and higher than average hiring need will be met by 2022’s smaller teacher pool.



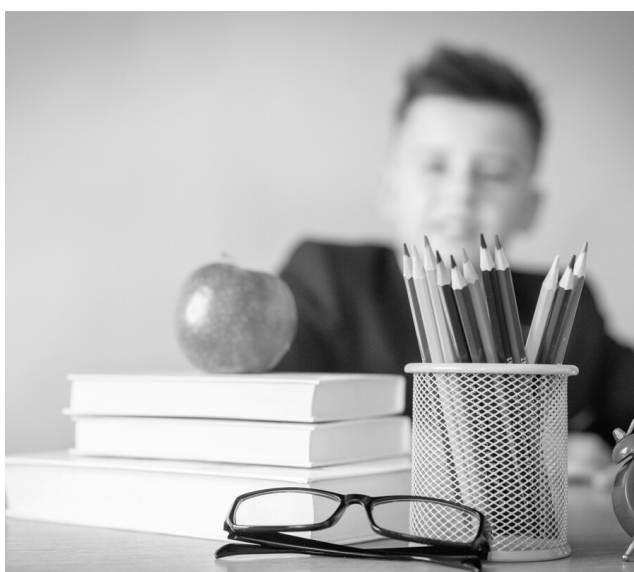


# Conclusions

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All indications are that 2022 will be the most challenging recruitment market we have yet experienced. With fewer teachers and more jobs to fill compared to the already high watermark of 2018-19 does not bode well for schools that are not proactive. Restrictive borders in key countries such as China and Hong Kong where dependent visas are few and far between, and with staffing economics often driving hiring decisions in the Middle East, it will be even more of a seller's market for single teachers and teaching couples from 'Native English Speaking' countries without accompanying dependants. Schools can expect particular difficulty recruiting for High School/ Secondary levels, particularly for STEM subjects and it will pay to be especially proactive with these vacancies.

It is important for all schools to realise that 2022 will be anything but a 'normal' recruitment year, and as hard a time they had recruiting in 2018-19, it will be even more difficult. Taking proactive steps such as recruiting earlier, engaging with agencies earlier and more proactively, and trying to retain current staff seem sensible in light of the market conditions.



## About Edvectus

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Edvectus is a specialist international school recruitment agency with worldwide offices staffed mainly by internationally experienced ex-teachers and educationalists. Established in 2013, we offer bespoke, intelligence-led recruitment solutions for international schools including retained search for school senior leaders and customised and focussed teacher recruitment events. Find out more at [www.edvectus.com](http://www.edvectus.com) or email us at [info@edvectus.com](mailto:info@edvectus.com)

(1)[One in Four Teachers Needed Overseas by 2029](#), TES, Claudia Civinini, December 2019

(2)What is causing the teacher shortage in the US and UK?, Study International, Luisa Kendall, <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/causing-teacher-shortage-us-uk>, December 2018