



# TEACHERS AND WORKLOAD

## A survey report by the National Education Union on teacher workload in schools and academies

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*"I spend every evening and weekend working. If I don't, I feel guilty for not working and I am made to feel guilty as well. I am now planning to leave the profession - the workload is making me ill and I want my life back."*

*"I find it hard to make time for family and friends - and when I do, I find it increasingly stressful worrying about what I am not doing for work."*

*"I'm not able to have a life. I hate this job. Nothing is ever good enough. It's not about the children, it's about data."*

*"It's unmanageable and I need a new career. I'm unhappy most of the time and am unwell with stress and anxiety. It affects my family time considerably - I often miss time with my children and when I do spend time with them it's not quality as I'm either too tired or am worrying about what I have to do."*

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This report sets out the views of 8,173 teachers on their workload, as expressed to an NEU survey conducted in late 2017. It covers the impact of workload on teachers' work-life balance, the things which teachers regard as the main drivers of that workload, the effectiveness of Government and school initiatives to reduce workload pressures, and more effective steps which teachers think could be taken to improve the situation.

The responses provide a challenging and, in many cases, deeply worrying analysis of the workload crisis that teachers are currently facing. It provides further evidence of the extent and causes of the drastic recruitment and retention problems many schools and academies are experiencing.

The NEU has been warning the Government that the continued increase in teacher workload is harming the profession and therefore the education of our children. This survey shows that teacher workload remains a key issue in schools and academies; that current Government initiatives have proved ineffective; and that the impact of excessive workload is continuing to drive far too many teachers out of the profession.

## **The survey response**

Respondents were fairly evenly split between secondary schools (44%) and primary schools (42%). The remainder work in other settings, mainly special schools, early years settings and all through schools. 78% of respondents work full time.

Responses did not vary significantly between male and female teachers, or between those teachers working in schools maintained by local authorities and those teaching in academy settings.

There were, however, some significant variations between the experiences of teachers working in the primary and secondary sectors, and between recently qualified and more experienced teachers which will be highlighted throughout this report where relevant.

## Overall perceptions of teacher workload

- **84% said that workload was manageable only “sometimes” or “never”**
- **81% said they have considered leaving teaching in the last year because of workload**
- **Teachers in mid and later career are as likely to have considered leaving teaching as recently qualified teachers, confirming that retention of experienced teachers is increasingly as challenging as retaining recently qualified teachers**

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*“I feel I have no life - I simply work and will very soon be one more statistic of a teacher who can't bear it any longer and will quit!”*

*“It affects my health. Some days I feel overwhelmed and blank out for short periods of time.”*

*“I will have to leave a job I love because it will be impossible to stay until retirement.”*

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More than 8 out of 10 respondents said they had considered leaving teaching as a result of unmanageable workload issues, with 34% saying they can “never” achieve a good balance between their work and their private life. Just over 1 out of 10 teachers said they were able to achieve a good work/life balance “always” or “most of the time”.

Perhaps the most worrying finding of this survey is the fact that the massive crisis in retention is now being seen at all stages of teachers’ careers – recently qualified and more experienced teachers are equally likely to have considered teaching, with 80% of teachers with less than five years teaching experience and 84% of teachers who had been teaching for 11 years or more reported that they have considered leaving teaching in the last year because of workload.

## Time spent on teaching and non-teaching work

- **Over 80% of teachers are now teaching more hours than the average teaching hours in 2016**
- **More than one third of teachers are working at home for more than 16 hours a week at evenings and weekends**

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*“I have no time to enjoy life or plan engaging lessons as I am too busy marking, assessing, reading and responding to emails at all hours.”*

*“People seem to forget teachers are people and are not machines! There is also the need to remember we are not office staff.”*

*“I regularly work in excess of 60h per week. This is unsustainable for my health and mental wellbeing.”*

*“I can’t do the best for the students because my attention and time is demanded by a pointless paper filling exercise.”*

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The DfE’s 2016 Teacher Workload Survey showed that classroom teachers spent, on average, 55.4 hours per week on teaching and other teaching-related work

This NEU survey suggests firstly that teaching hours may now be increasing as a consequence of funding cuts and rising pupil numbers. According to the DfE survey, in 2016 classroom teachers spent an average of 20.7 hours a week teaching. This survey found that 82% of full time classroom teachers said they were teaching more hours than this on average every week. This was more likely to affect primary school respondents, 8 out of ten whom reported teaching longer than average hours, compared to 63% of secondary school respondents.

The DfE survey did not seek to break down how much non-teaching work was undertaken at school (during or outside school hours) or at home during evening and weekends. The NEU survey therefore asked explicitly about this.

37% of respondents said they spent more than 16 hours a week completing school work during their evenings and weekends in their most recent working week. Primary teachers were slightly more likely spend more time on work they had taken home with them, with 44% of primary respondents reporting working more than 16 hours a week during evenings and weekends, compared to 39% of secondary respondents. Teachers in other settings were slightly less likely to work at home.

61% of all respondents reported spending over 3 hours a day on tasks that did not involve teaching, with 13% working more than 30 hours on non-teaching activities.

## The drivers of workload

- **74% said pressure to increase pupil tests scores and exam grades was a main driver of workload**
  - **Nearly half said preparing for schools inspections, like Ofsted or “mocksteds” added to teacher workload**
  - **Over half said recent changes to the curriculum and pupil assessment were a significant driver of workload**
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*“I never have time to complete all of my tasks, let alone do them well. I am constantly exhausted.”*

*“The amount of (unnecessary) paperwork, multiple meetings, working through lunch breaks, arriving early and leaving late, and then still taking work home. In my short career, I've seen so many amazing teachers leave the profession due to the stress and workload we face on a day-to-day basis. If it stays the same or increases, then the chronic shortage of teachers we already have is just going to get worse.”*

*“Working a 70 hour week is not reasonable for anyone.”*

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The survey asked respondents to identify the three areas of teaching practice that were the biggest drivers of workload in schools. The most cited relate to increased pressure on teachers to “prove” their effectiveness through ensuring students hit certain targets or performing well for school inspections.

The most frequently cited workload drivers were as follows:

- 74% Pressure to increase pupil test scores/ exam grades
- 52% Changes to curriculum/ assessment/ exams
- 46% Ofsted, mock inspections, other inspections
- 41% Lack of money and resources in school
- 33% Reduction of Support Staff
- 33% Demands from school leaders/ governors
- 27% Increasing class sizes
- 25% Changes to systems and structures
- 21% Expectation to teach outside of timetable (e.g. lunchtime, holiday or after school classes)
- 18% Lack of consultation with staff in the workplace
- 17% Parental expectations (e.g. reports, parents meetings, regular emails)
- 10% Lack of support from outside agencies
- 8% Having to teach outside their specialism
- 6% Reduction in funding for extra-curricular activities, meaning the teacher is asked to run more clubs

53% of primary teacher respondents considered Ofsted preparation to be a main workload driver, compared to 38% of secondary respondents.

More of teachers with less than 5 years' experience (24%) cited an expectation to teach outside their timetable (i.e. providing lunchtime lessons, or classes after school or during the holidays) as a major workload driver, than respondents who had been teaching for 11 years or more (19%). Patterns were otherwise similar irrespective of experience.

Generally, throughout the survey, there were very few differences between the experiences of teachers in maintained schools and academies. Teachers who work in academies were, however, more likely to attribute increased workload on their school's Leadership Team – 48% of primary academy teachers and 52% of secondary academy teachers, compared to 40% of primary and 48% of secondary teachers working in maintained schools.

## Have Government initiatives had an impact?

- **Over half of teachers say their workload has actually increased since the launch of the Government's "Workload Challenge"**
  - **Only 14% have seen the Government's workload advice for schools**
  - **Half of teachers blame the workload problem on current Government policy**
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*"[The Government's workload advice] is lip service. In practice the Government has asked for more. The reality is that this cannot be delivered in the same amount of time, especially if you cut staffing and budgets and expect schools to pick up the slack (and blame) for wider social problems."*

*"There has been virtually no reference to [the Government's advice] in my school, mainly because it is just words; there doesn't seem to be any discernible practical application."*

*"It is very noticeable that every year the pressure increases. There's marking for marking's sake, not for real effective feedback that moves children on. It's the quantity not quality that counts. Countless initiatives and cutbacks means there's not enough money for real support or even resources; we have to buy these ourselves."*

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Autumn 2014 saw the launch of the Government's Workload Challenge – an initiative aimed at reducing teacher workload by outlining strategies to decrease workload, as well as highlighting tasks teachers should not be doing as they were deemed unnecessary to aid in pupil learning.

The main resource the Government has produced to publicise its initiative was the ['Reducing Teacher Workload' poster](#), issued in autumn 2017, which the NUT sent to every school at its own expense.

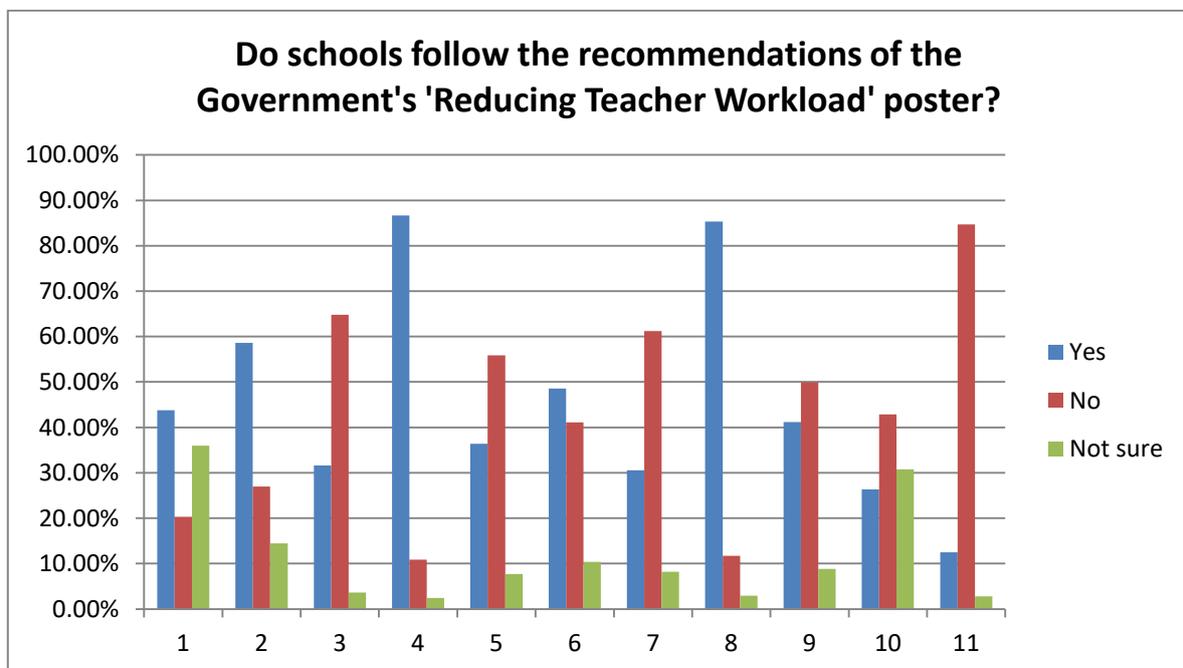
A massive 87% of respondents reported that the Government's Workload Challenge has not decreased teacher workload. In fact 59% reported an increase in workload since the launch of the campaign. More experienced teachers were more likely to report an increase in workload since the launch of the Government's campaign, with 67% of respondents with more than 11 years' experience reporting a noticeable increase in their workload, compared to 33% of teachers with less than five years' experience.

Most schools have no written policy with regard to workload or work/life balance. Primary schools were more likely to have no policy (66%) compared to secondary schools (53%). Secondary school teachers were more likely to say that such policies had not helped relieve workload (42%), compared to 29% of primary school teachers.

Since the launch of the Government’s campaign to tackle teacher workload, 6 out of 10 teachers have reported an increase, whilst nearly 30% say the campaign has had no impact on their workload, a damning indictment of its lack of effectiveness.

Only 14% of respondents had seen the Government’s workload poster. The extent to which teachers reported that their school was following the Government’s recommendations as set out on that poster – whether or not they had themselves seen the poster - is set out in the table below.

Half of teachers (47%) believe that current Government policy is predominantly responsible for current teacher workload. Almost as many (46%) believe that their school management team is responsible for their workload, but many of these acknowledged in their comments that those school leaders were themselves under pressure from Government and Ofsted which led in turn to the pressure on classroom teachers and support staff.



- Key:
- 1 = does following your school’s marking policy help your pupils to progress?
  - 2 = is there an expectation in the marking policy outlining the amount of written marking you should do?
  - 3 = do you have scheduled blocks of time for collaborative planning?
  - 4 = do you have regular PPA time for marking/planning?
  - 5 = do you have regular directed time for discussion about pupil learning?
  - 6 = do you have high quality schemes of work in place?
  - 7 = do you have enough high quality resources available for you to use?
  - 8 = do you feel you must create your own resources?
  - 9 = is it clear how all data you collect will be used?
  - 10 = does data collected help pupils to progress?
  - 11 = do you have scheduled conversations with your direct line manager about how long things will take you to do and how you will find that time?

## Lack of effective action at school level to reduce workload

- **60% said there is no plan to reduce workload in their school and no way of measuring or managing workload**
  - **Only 8% said that workload has been successfully reduced by such initiatives**
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*“Reduced TA hours mean I have to do more of the tasks they would do. Photocopying after school, for example, means I have to take more marking home and work later into the evening.”*

*“We are not trusted to get on and do our job. We are accountable at every level which creates more stress and paperwork. We are exhausted and great teachers are being driven out of the profession because they are burned out!”*

*“I don't know how I can change how I work, I don't know how long I can maintain it and the impact that it's having on my family is horrific – I am near marriage breakdown and one of the reasons is my job.”*

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The findings of this survey prove beyond doubt that even where they are actively happening, current school level initiatives to tackle workload are not working. School leaders are starting to acknowledge this as an issue – 20% of respondents reported their school had a ‘well-being’ policy – but with 11% stating they do not have regular PPA time it is clear that the rhetoric is not always backed up with effective action in schools.

60% of respondents said there is no policy or plan to reduce workload in their school or to improve work/life balance, and no way of measuring or managing workload. Only 8% said that workload has been successfully reduced by such initiatives.

52% of secondary school and 42% of primary school respondents blame school leadership for the increase in workload. Providing written lesson plans to Leadership is a particular workload issue in primary schools.

71% of respondents felt that support staff were not deployed in a way which reduced workload and 85% reported having to create their own resources. 50% were unclear about how data collected would be used and 43% felt that such data did not help pupil progress. This provides yet more evidence that teachers’ workload is being exacerbated by non-teaching administration tasks and a lack of effective support for pupil learning in the classroom.

## Lack of meaningful CPD

- **40% reported a loss of CPD in the last 5 years**
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*“Box-ticking CPD, with no impact on quality of Teaching and Learning...”*

*“The school has been very unwilling for me to do CPD – they are only happy about me doing weekend sessions (unpaid) because they are unwilling to pay for supply cover. They will compromise staff CPD to save money.”*

*“My targets this year are simply jumping through hoops to meet school requirements. I cannot possibly commit to doing anything else for myself as I am already on average working a 60 hour week.”*

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40% of respondents said their opportunities for CPD have reduced in the last 5 years. 61% said their CPD was predominantly undertaken to meet school requirements.

45% of primary respondents had seen their CPD reduced in the last five years compared to 35% of secondary respondents.

More experienced teachers were more likely to be missing out on meaningful CPD. Almost half (46%) of respondents who had been teaching for 11 years or longer reported a reduction in their CPD in the last five years compared to 31% of respondents who had been teaching less than five years.

Many respondents reported a significant increase in “in house” training as a result of budget cuts, and felt that such CPD was not an effective means of developing their skills. Only 12% had been able to choose their own CPD based on what they felt was a meaningful use of their time.

## What working practices could be changed or stopped to reduce workload?

- **The majority of teachers say that tackling Ofsted preparation and other unnecessary administration would make a big difference to their workload**

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*“Teaching is about the children, not what hoops you have to jump through to say you have done some new initiative that takes up all your time organising, recording and evidencing what has happened.”*

*“The Government can help by imposing less admin responsibility and by stopping changing the curriculum, assessment etc. continually and unnecessarily.”*

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The survey asked teachers themselves to set out steps which they thought could be taken to reduce workload. The responses show that the majority of concerns around workload involve teachers undertaking unnecessary tasks that do not benefit student learning.

58% of respondents said that changing or stopping their commitment to general administration tasks would “make a big difference” to workload. 69% said changing or stopping Ofsted preparation in their school would make a difference to their workload.

70% of respondents said that changing or stopping half termly data collection would make a difference in reducing workload, whilst 50% said they are unclear as to how data they collect is used in school. 43% said data collected does not help pupils progress in their learning.

One third of respondents felt that a reduction in workload would reduce sickness in staff, with 90% stating that it would also reduce stress.

Over half (56%) said that a reduction in workload would make them feel more valued in the profession.

When asked what respondents would do with any time freed up by a reduction in workload, 52% said “nothing”, as they would then simply be working reasonable hours.

## What strategic steps should be taken to reduce workload?

- **Over half of teachers believe that instituting more formal discussions on workload – with senior leaders, with appraisers and with colleagues – would help to identify ways of reducing workload**

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*“An attempt at reducing workload has been made by SLT but in order to meet all the expectations the hours have to be put in. It is all very well saying we should work less, but if the work isn't getting done, we'll be criticised and our jobs will be at risk.”*

*“Your life is teaching. To do your job properly you make sacrifices with your personal life.”*

*“The workload is getting more excessive. It is not possible to complete all the required work within our normal working hours, this has resulted in a huge amount of extra hours, including late nights, early mornings and hours and hours over the weekends and holidays.”*

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The survey asked about strategic steps which teachers felt that school leaders and classroom teachers could take in school to seek to reduce workload.

There was strong support for the concept of discussing workload concerns collectively – 59% supported the idea of holding a discussion on workload with schools leaders, 59% supported discussions among teachers themselves, and 54% supported the idea of discussing workload concerns as part of the appraisal process.

53% of respondents felt that undertaking a workload impact assessment in their school would have a “big impact” on reducing workload, although only 1% of respondents said they already had this practice in place.

There was also widespread support for making such discussions a permanent part of school life, with 28% supporting a regular consultative structure with their SLT, and 25% supporting the idea of an union-convened wellbeing group in school.

## Conclusion

- **81% of respondents said they have considered leaving teaching in the last year because of workload**
  - **One third of respondents said their workload in the past year has never been manageable**
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*“I’m drowning and it makes me hate my job.”*

*“I will be giving up teaching after this year as the workload and pressure has become too much.”*

*“I can’t see us having a family while I am still working as a teacher as I wouldn’t have time for myself let alone a baby.”*

*“It is an ongoing struggle. I am constantly torn between spending time with my family and helping my children, and preparing so I can teach and support the students in my class. I constantly feel guilty that I am letting someone down and nothing is good enough.”*

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This report provides a shocking view of the realities of the workload crisis in teaching and highlights the extreme pressures teachers are facing in schools.

This year has seen a dramatic worsening in teacher recruitment – the Government has once again failed to reach its target in uptakes to teaching training places, while applicants for next year’s training places have fallen even more sharply. Retaining our existing teachers therefore becomes even more important than it was already.

Current teacher workload is unsustainable. As well as damaging the learning experiences of young people, it is leading teachers to burn out or change career in order to preserve their own mental wellbeing.

Much of the workload is both unnecessary and unhelpful in promoting good practice for teachers or effective learning for students. A drastic increase in meaningless admin tasks – exacerbated by the loss of support staff posts – swallows up an unreasonable amount of teachers’ time, leaving them feeling stressed, frustrated and driving many out of the classroom altogether.

The Government’s Workload Challenge has thus far proved to be a complete failure. Many teachers are unaware that it has launched any workload initiative at all. It is time for the Government to promote real change in school working culture by abolishing the focus on ‘teaching to test’ and the gathering of meaningless data, allowing teachers the time to get on with what they do best – teach.

On 10 March 2018, Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds spoke of his ambitions to tackle unnecessary teacher workload and acknowledged the Government's role in creating an unhealthy workload culture in schools. The NEU welcomes the fact that the Government is finally beginning to recognise the scale of the crisis, but schools need more than just words – they need a solid, practical commitment to reduce the pressure of workload in education.

The Government must act now to significantly reduce teachers' workload and must take urgent steps to prevent the current crisis in retention and recruitment deepening.

National Education Union  
March 2018