

Workload

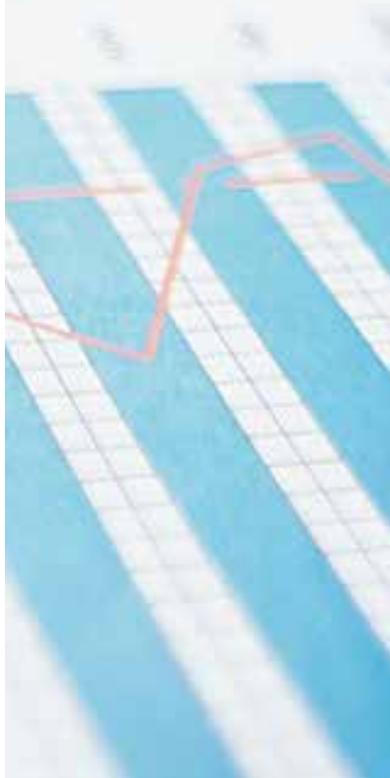
Independent Teacher
Workload Review Group
reports on Marking, Planning
and Data Management



Summary of the three reports
with National Education Union
commentary and advice



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The Independent Teacher Workload Review Groups were established by the DfE to report on, and suggest solutions to, unnecessary burdens associated with marking, planning and data management.

Their March 2016 reports, available here, (<https://www.teachers.org.uk/pay-pensions-conditions/workload/review-group-reports>) make recommendations to a wide audience – the Government, Ofsted, school leaders, school governing bodies, LA/MATs and teachers. The recommendations were accepted in full by then Secretary of State Nicky Morgan.

The reports are well researched and argued and in many respects pull no punches in debunking myths, highlighting Government failures and setting out what must change. They could, if implemented, go some way to reducing workload in schools – although they focus on only three areas, so do not address all the drivers of excessive workload and accountability. Where the recommendations have not been implemented, we advise school leaders to work with staff to do so, without delay.

Marking

Summary of “Eliminating Unnecessary Workload around Marking”

What is the purpose of this report?

It aims to ‘help schools review their practice with the aim of shrinking the importance marking has gained and stopping unnecessary and burdensome practice.’

What does the report identify as the main problems with the way marking is often carried out in schools?

- That its ‘excessive nature, depth and frequency’ is ‘burdensome’.
- That it is frequently seen to be ‘serving a different purpose such as demonstrating teacher performance or to satisfy the requirements of other mainly adult audiences. Too often, it is the marking itself which is being monitored and commented on by leaders, rather than pupil outcomes and progress as a result of quality feedback’.
- That there can be ‘an excessive reliance on the labour intensive practices under our definition of deep marking, such as extensive written comments in different colour pens, or the indication of when verbal feedback has been given by adding ‘VF’ on a pupil’s work’.
- That it can be ‘unmanageable for teachers and teachers forced to mark work late at night and at weekends are unlikely to operate effectively in the classroom.’
- That there are ‘myths that need to be de-bunked’, namely ‘that you must spend hours marking to be a good teacher; that writing pages of feedback makes you more effective; and that there is a link between quantity of marking and pupil progress.’



Debunking the myths

- Giving feedback to pupils is vital for learning: written marking isn't.
- Spending hours marking does not make you a good teacher.
- Writing pages of feedback does not make you more effective as a teacher.
- There is no obvious link between the quantity of marking and pupil progress.
- There is no guidance from Government or Ofsted that says teachers must provide written feedback and that pupils should respond in writing. Not even in the Teacher Standards.
- Marking doesn't need its own policy – it is a part of assessment.



Advice for NEU members

As NEU members, get together and consider these challenges:

Can you stop written marking – for a week; for a phase; for a subject; for ever (some schools have)?

If so, use the time to engage in the following challenges:

- Embed the principles of effective marking: do you have a shared agreement about what manageable, meaningful and motivating marking looks like in your school – for the age range you teach, for the subject you teach?
- Do you have an understanding, as a staff and shared with your SLT, about how long marking takes?
- Does your assessment policy (or your marking policy if you still have one) have a workload impact assessment? If not, can you come to some (rough) figures for how long it would take to fulfil?
- Do you know what impact your marking has on pupil progress? Can you agree a project with your school leaders to review the impact of marking with the aim of minimising unnecessary demands on teachers' time?
- How many different techniques do you have to assess pupil learning? How many are identified in your assessment policy? How can you increase that range?



Planning & Resources

Summary of “Eliminating Unnecessary Workload around Planning & Teaching Resources”

What is the purpose of this report?

The report highlights that effective planning is the key to effective teaching but seeks to address ‘the unnecessary nature of the work and lesson plans’. The first paragraph of the report could not be clearer when it states: ‘Teachers spend an undue amount of time planning and resourcing lessons and there are clear measures that should be taken by Government, Ofsted, schools and teachers to lessen this burden.’

What does the report identify as the main problems with the way planning is often carried out in schools?

The report is scathing about the practice of creating detailed plans which can become a ‘box-ticking exercise’, taking time away from the real business of planning whilst offering ‘false comfort’ of purpose. The blame for this is placed firmly at the door of the Government and Ofsted and the ‘real and perceived’ demands they have made. In the past there has been much focus on the ‘perceived’ demands of Ofsted and Government so it is helpful that the report acknowledges that these demands have also been ‘real’.

The NEU wholeheartedly welcomes the following statement, which has also been endorsed by the then Secretary of State: ‘Too often, ‘planning’ refers to the production of daily written lesson plans which function as proxy evidence for an accountability ‘paper trail’ rather than the process of effective planning for pupil progress and attainment’.





Debunking the myths

- Planning is vital, the daily lesson plan much less so.
- Sharing your planning and resources, and using other people's, doesn't make you a bad teacher.
- Spending time finding (or creating) the 'perfect' resource doesn't make you a better teacher.
- You can use high quality textbooks to support planning and teaching, not to replace your professional knowledge and skill.
- Ofsted doesn't require individual lesson plans during an inspection, or past plans.
- You can't judge good teaching by seeing a lesson plan.



Advice for NEU members

As NEU members, get together and consider these challenges:

Can you stop writing out plans for every lesson – for a week, for a phase, for a subject, for ever; can you adapt plans or resources from another teacher or a previous year? If so, use the time to engage in the following challenges:

- Do you have schemes of work? Can you agree a programme of review and development over the next few terms so that everyone has ownership and will feel able to use and adapt them?
- Are there blocks of time available for planning when other teachers are available so that you can plan together? Do you know how to plan collaboratively and effectively so that you are improving your own subject knowledge as well as your teaching and the children's learning?
- Do you have any externally produced resources? Can you adapt them to meet your needs? Is there any money for new resources: how will you evaluate what's available?
- Are you expected to plan every subject, or every phase, in the same way? Can you discuss with your SLT/governors what effective planning looks like across different subjects and phases?
- Do you know what impact your planning has on pupil progress? Can you agree a project with your school leaders to review the impact of planning with the aim of minimising unnecessary demands on teachers' time?
- Think about how SLT can evidence effective planning and teaching without the need to see written lesson plans.
- Does your planning policy have a workload impact assessment? If not, ask management to draw one up for consultation with NEU members.

Data Management

Summary of “Eliminating Unnecessary Workload associated with Data Management”

What is the purpose of this report?

This report looks specifically at the issues around data management, explaining what the problem is, how it has arisen and how it can be addressed.

The report acknowledges that when used well, data can have a positive impact, helping teachers to teach and school leaders to focus on the right issues. This report identifies how and why it has become a burden rather than a benefit and what needs to change to reduce the burdens on teachers.

What does the report identify as the main problems with the way data is managed?

Two key reasons are identified as to why data management has become a burden rather than a benefit; firstly when the purpose for collecting it has not been clear and secondly when the process of collecting has been inefficient, for example because of duplication or because it has taken too long.

The DfE comes under fire for its practices with the suggestion that its approach is inconsistent; incoherent and burdensome, stating that ‘the amount and frequency of data required by the DfE is unduly onerous’ and that ‘The DfE should review its processes to ensure consistency and coherence across its data requirements.’

The report also highlights the role of Ofsted in driving excessive data management demands, particularly the previous approach of looking for evidence of pupil progress within single lessons. Although the Ofsted framework has changed, the report recognises that the workload pressures associated with inspection have not eased.

In response to this the following message in the report could not be clearer:

‘It is not enough for those in positions of authority in the accountability system – Ofsted, Government, Regional Schools Commissioners, Local Authorities, governors, school leaders – simply to say that data does not need to be used as before to demonstrate effectiveness. Instead teachers and school leaders need to be given clear signals, including through the inspection process, that ‘gold plating,’ i.e. collecting everything ‘just in case’ is not just unnecessary, it is damaging as it takes teachers and school leaders away from more productive tasks.’

The report goes on to state:

‘Teachers need to know if pupils are on track to achieve end-of-year expectations and whether pupils are where they should be, but are best placed to make such judgements through their professional knowledge without recourse to elaborate assessment, data generating and recording systems. Government (including Regional Schools Commissioners), Ofsted, local authorities and school leaders should support this approach.’





Debunking the myths

- Data, when well used, can have a profound and positive impact: data collection of itself doesn't.
- Data shouldn't be collected 'just in case' or to be 'ready'.
- Data shouldn't be collected 'just because you can' – data collection should have a clear purpose.
- Ofsted doesn't require a particular format nor a particular frequency: you should present any data in the format that schools would normally use to monitor pupils' progress.



Advice for NEU members

Consider these challenges:

Stop collecting data if the burden of collection outweighs their use; don't collect summative data more than three times a year per pupils; don't collect formative data. Use the time to engage in the following challenges:

- Do you know why each piece of data is collected? Do you know who uses the data and how? If not, ask.
- Does your school have an assessment and data management calendar, to understand the assessment demands throughout the year? If not, can you develop one?
- Does your school regularly audit in-school data management procedures to ensure they are robust, valid, effective and manageable? If not, suggest that this is good practice.
- Do you have to record data in different ways for different audiences? Can you discuss requirements with your SLT and streamline collection?



Conclusion

The publication of the three reports has been welcomed by the NEU as a first step towards changing the culture in schools in respect of excessive workload and accountability in respect of marking, planning and data. Other areas also need to be addressed including appraisal, lesson observation, meetings, and new initiatives and policies.

This briefing offers a summary of the most helpful aspects and most compelling arguments set out in these three reports. Where time is available, NEU members are urged to download the reports and read them in full.

These reports must not be allowed to sit on a shelf gathering dust. If they are to have the impact desired by the review groups who worked on them, their findings must be discussed in schools and the recommendations followed. NEU members have a key role to play in this process.

The best approach to tackling workload is a whole school approach, where school leaders and staff work together to identify the pressures and to find solutions that work for everyone. NEU members, whether teachers, support staff or school leaders, are encouraged to make time for meetings, surveys and discussions together to make the most difference. However, if senior leaders are still not engaging with the recommendations set out in the reports, the NEU will support members in order to resolve matters, including where necessary through a ballot for industrial action. This continues the successful initiatives already pursued by ATL in Northern Ireland and by NUT in England and Wales. See *Tackling Workload Together* at www.neu.org.uk/workload for more information.