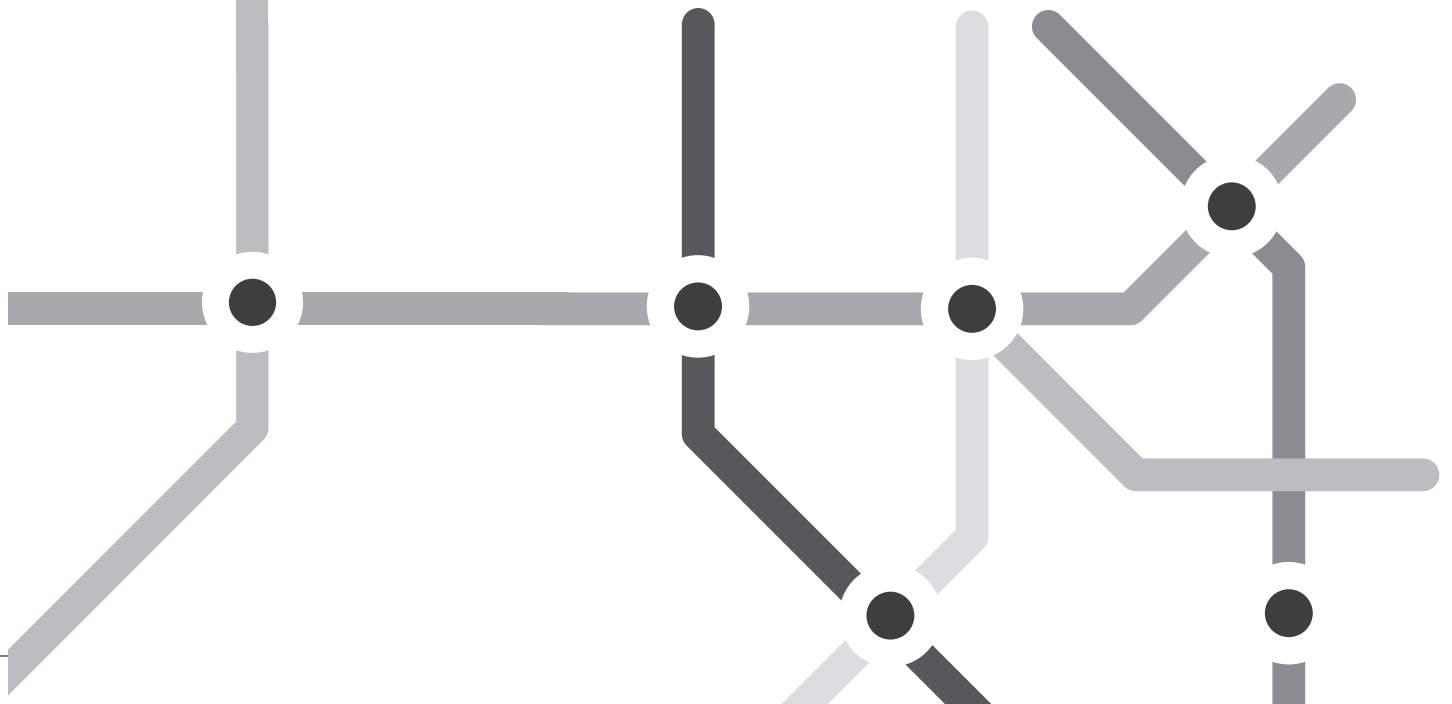




PART 1

UNDERSTANDING PRIMARY TEACHING

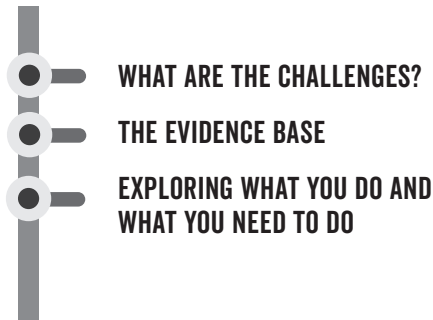




WHAT ARE THE ISSUES SURROUNDING TEACHER WORKLOAD?

Michael Green is the Head of Strategic Partnerships Education at the University of Greenwich. In December 2017 he was seconded to the Department for Education as an advisor focusing on teacher workload; specifically for trainee teachers and teachers in the early stages of their career.

In this chapter Michael Green explores the evidence base surrounding teacher workload in England including the issues and challenges that teachers face. He shines a light on the ways in which unnecessary burdens can be addressed.



KEY WORDS

- Workload
- burdens
- marking
- planning
- data management
- time management
- prioritising

HOUSTON WE HAVE A PROBLEM!

Teaching is, without question, a fantastic and rewarding job and should be a profession that many aspire to join. That buzz you get when you help pupils in your class fulfil their potential is unlike any other feeling. Despite these rewards, teaching is certainly not without its challenges. It almost seems impossible these days to discuss any topic relating to teaching without the topic of workload being raised. Too often we are seeing

teachers being asked to do too much. The feeling of an endless list of jobs to get through; even after working all hours the list continues to be added to. It is when the list of jobs to perform becomes the driver of your life that the passion and enthusiasm for the job can ebb away. Is it any wonder that we currently have both a teacher recruitment and retention crisis? The House of Commons Education Committee's 2017 report on the recruitment and retention of teachers highlighted the pressure of teacher workload to be an important influencing factor.

TEACHER WORKLOAD: THE RECENT EVIDENCE BASE

CRITICAL QUESTION

What are the challenges relating to workload for teachers?

A number of recent surveys can help to inform the evidence base relating to teacher workload in England.

The 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) of lower secondary teachers across 34 countries suggested that teachers in England worked, on average 9 hours more than the median of all participating countries. Importantly, this additional time was not as a result of more hours spent teaching, but more time spent undertaking planning, marking, undertaking school management duties and carrying out administrative tasks.

KEY INFORMATION

The 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) survey by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) can be found here:

<http://www.oecd.org/education/talis/>

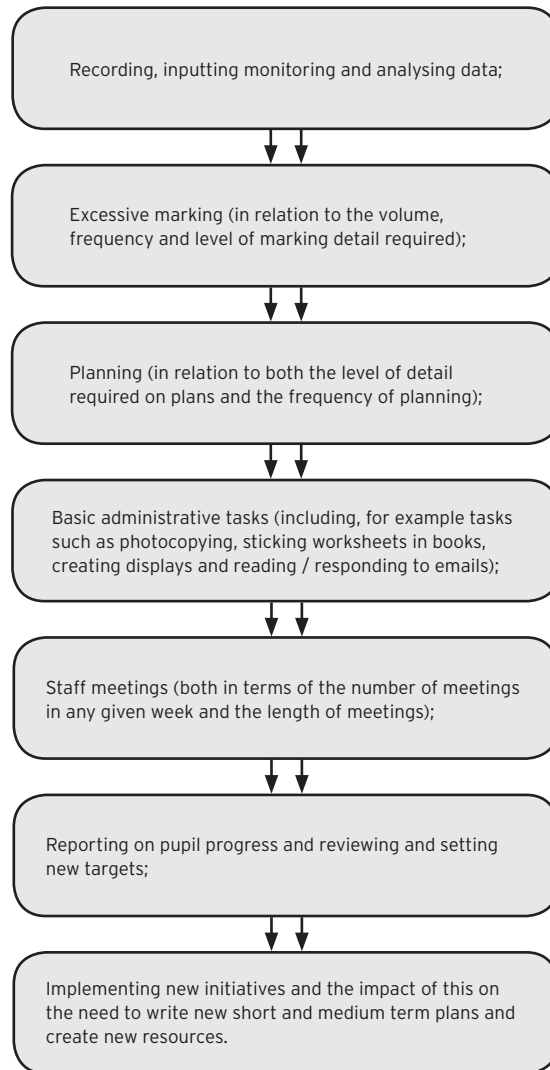
Many of these tasks will resonate with primary teachers too. Importantly, the survey also found that those teachers who felt that their workload was unmanageable reported lower levels of job satisfaction.

In 2014, the DfE undertook the 'Workload Challenge' to understand more about teachers' experiences and also ways in which their workload could be reduced. There were just under 44,000 responses to the survey conducted.

CRITICAL QUESTION

Which of your working week tasks are of the most / least value to the pupils in your class?

A number of tasks were identified, which, whilst the majority acknowledged were important tasks undertaken as a teacher; the excessive level of detail required, the need to duplicate information in multiple places or over-bureaucratic systems made many of these tasks burdensome and impacted negatively on their workload. Some of the tasks identified which the respondents felt took up too much of their time included;



Many of the tasks listed above are ones undertaken in addition to teaching – a similar finding to the TALIS survey. With little time for teachers to undertake many of these tasks within the school day many respondents commented that it is not uncommon for them to complete these in their own time in order to try to manage their workload.

CRITICAL QUESTION

Which tasks give you the most professional satisfaction?
Which tasks tend to cause you the most frustration or stress?

A key driver identified by teachers as adding a significant burden to their workload concerned the monitoring and accountability culture – both internally and externally. A fear of inspection and the resultant culture this created within schools through the need to always be ‘Ofsted ready’, collecting evidence, mock inspections, lesson observations and other forms of monitoring was keenly felt by many respondents.

Helpfully, the survey not only identified the burdens but also sought potential solutions. Given the burdens identified, it will come as no surprise that many of the solutions related broadly to changes accountability and the need for additional support.

At the centre of Bruner’s theory of learning is the idea of *Instrumental Conceptualism*, with the following three elements: acquiring new information or knowledge, transforming and manipulating knowledge, and the checking of knowledge. Bruner’s ideas on learning were well articulated as follows:

‘Bruner’s thesis was that the study of children in problem-solving situations had concentrated too much on the nature of the tasks and the stimuli presented to the child, and too little on the dynamic qualities the child brought to the tasks in order to solve them.’

Brown (1977, p. 74)

KEY INFORMATION

The three independent reports to reduced unnecessary workload practice

In response to the 2014 workload challenge, the Department for Education launched three independent teacher workload review groups to develop principles, advice and guidance focussing on reducing unnecessary workload burdens relating to:

1. Marking
2. Planning and teaching resources
3. Data management

The reports of recommendations from the three groups can be accessed online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>

It is certainly worth reading these and considering how, within your school, the recommendations have been acted upon.

As a result of the Workload Challenge, the Government committed to undertake a large scale survey every two years to track teacher workload; the first of which took place in 2016 and was completed by just over 3,000 teachers. A number of key findings relating to working hours, tasks undertaken by teachers and teachers' attitudes towards their workload are summarised below:

- The average, self-reported, working hours for all respondents was 54.4 hours during the week in question. Consistent with previous studies, primary teachers reported working longer hours – 55.5 hours. Of this, 17.5 hours were reported as hours worked out of school at evenings and weekends. Significantly, primary teachers in the early stages of their career reported even higher working hours – 59.5 of which 18.1 hours were worked out of school. Interestingly, of those 59.5 hours, teaching accounted for 23.9 hours. In other words 60% of time is spent on undertaking activities other than teaching.
- Given the responses to the early 2014 Workload Challenge, unsurprisingly, the three non-teaching activities that primary teachers felt they spent too much time on included planning and preparing for lessons (including resource preparation), general administrative tasks (which includes recording, inputting, monitoring & analysing data) and correcting and marking pupils' work.
- When asked about their perceptions of workload as an issue, the majority of all respondents (93%) stated it was a problem. Furthermore, 97% felt that they were unable to complete their workload within their contracted working hours. Given the two previous responses, it will come as no surprise that 85% of teachers did not feel that they were able to achieve a good work life balance.

Sadly, the rather depressing and bleak picture emerging from these recent surveys is not a new issue. Back in 2001, a study conducted for the government of the time by PriceWaterhouseCoopers found there to be an imbalance between teaching and administrative tasks with many of the tasks undertaken not seen as positively supporting the learning of the pupils in their classrooms.

The 2001 study is generally regarded as the catalyst for a number of actions described as 'historic' by the government of the time. These actions included changes to teachers' contracts which identified 24 administrative tasks that teachers should not have to undertake and the introduction in 2015 of guaranteed planning, preparation and assessment time.

CRITICAL QUESTION

What steps can you take to ensure that you are focusing on the tasks that impact children's learning, and spending less time on administrative tasks?

DISPELLING THE MYTHS ABOUT OFSTED

There exists, in some quarters of education, a misguided idea that certain activities must be 'carried out because Ofsted asks for them'. Much of this is pure myth. If you haven't already done so, it's worth reading the guidance by Ofsted on myths associated with inspections.

KEY INFORMATION

OFSTED Inspection Myths, can be accessed online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-inspection-handbook-from-september-2015/ofsted-inspections-mythbusting>

Some key points to highlight include:

Ofsted are only interested in how marking and feedback promote pupil learning - the frequency and form that this takes is not within the remit of an inspection;

Ofsted do not wish to see written evidence of oral feedback being provided to pupils;

Ofsted are only interested in the effectiveness of planning - not the format that it is presented in nor the detail included;

Ofsted do not want teachers to undertake additional work purely if the reason is related to preparing for an inspection.

Implications for you:

Always reflect on why you are being asked to do something. If it's about promoting pupil learning - great but if the reason you're being told is 'because of Ofsted' push back and refer them to the Ofsted myths guidance

MARKING

LET'S DO THE MATH ...

INFO 26.1

If you teach, say 3 lessons a day which require marking and there are thirty children in your class that's 90 pieces of work to mark per day. Now, for the sake of argument, let's say that on average it takes 3 minutes per piece to mark - we're now at 270 minutes - per day - multiply that over a week - 1350 minutes - or 22 + hours. Is it no wonder that marking is seen as burdensome?

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not advocating that marking should be scrapped but marking has to be manageable and if teachers are then left exhausted then this goes against the grain of advice by the NCETM (National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics) that the most important activity for teachers is the teaching itself – supported by the design and preparation of lessons.

Over the years the terms *marking* and *feedback* have come to be one in the same – but let's be clear - feedback and marking are not synonymous. As the accountability agenda within education has increased so, in a significant number of schools, has the misguided thought that everything has to be evidenced. This practice has to stop.

Even though I have called this section marking, it's important to remember that marking is one type of feedback – of which there are many other types. Sadly marking has become disproportionately valued within teaching.

CRITICAL QUESTION

Why has marking become disproportionately valued within teaching?

Worse still, the amount of feedback given has become confused with quality. The DfE's 2014 workload challenge consultation identified marking as the single biggest contributor to teacher workload being unsustainable. Is it any wonder we have cacophony within the profession?

Now, whilst it would be easy to simply blame the accountability agenda for this issue; teachers also have to burden some of the responsibility here. As a teacher I can recall the guilt of feeling that I 'needed' to write something in the child's book. I would urge anyone thinking that they need to write a written comment in every child's book for each lesson to challenge both themselves and others to reject this 'false comfort' (DfE 2016a:8) that everything needs to be marked. Instead; consider the three principles outlined in the Independent Report on Eliminating Unnecessary Workload around marking which states that feedback should be:



WHAT THEN IS FEEDBACK?

INFO 26.2

- The vast majority of interactions between teachers and pupils involve feedback
- As we walk around the room we are providing individuals, groups the class with feedback
- It's using strategies such as mini-plenaries
- It's all the questions that we ask
- It's asking pupils to self-assess their work against criteria
- It's modelling self and peer assessment strategies and empowering pupils to reflect on their progress and learning and identify their next steps

As you can see, none of the above even has to involve the use of a pen to provide a written comment. Let's now take a look at how one school has embedded the three principles above into their school policy:

CLASSROOM LINK

Andrew Percival, Deputy Headteacher at Stanley Road Primary School in Oldham shares the approach taken at his school to reduce workload and improve feedback:

At Stanley Road, we have introduced an approach to giving feedback to pupils that removes the need for written comments in pupils' books. We found that teachers were spending significant time marking work and were sceptical that this was an efficient use of teachers' time. We developed the following approach to reduce workload and, we believe, have also improved the quality of feedback given.

At the end of a lesson, teachers look through pupils' books and analyse the work carefully but, rather than write individual comments, they now make brief notes on the verbal feedback they will give in the next lesson. We use the following format to record these notes.

Work to Praise and Share	Need Further Support
Presentation	Basic Skills Errors
Misconceptions and Next Lesson Notes	

Teacher can now analyse a set of books quickly (often taking 15 - 20 minutes) and then use the time saved to plan the feedback they will give in the next lesson.

At the start of the next lesson, teachers use their notes to give feedback to the whole class to address common misconceptions. Good examples of work are shared under a visualiser to emphasise key teaching points and pupils may be given the chance to check their work for specific errors or given opportunities for further practice. These feedback sessions usually last between 5 - 10 minutes.

Teachers report that this approach has significantly reduced their workload. Not only do teachers no longer take books home to be marked but, we believe, that pupils are now taking much greater responsibility for responding to feedback and improving their own understanding.

PLANNING AND RESOURCES

Now don't get me wrong, planning is an essential task that teachers have to undertake. As Myatt (2016:19) rightly asserts; it is 'fundamental in providing structure and architecture for pupils' learning'. Unfortunately; one of the issues surrounding planning is that it has become more about teachers filling in boxes on planning templates which is no more than a paper trail for accountability purposes. Jill Berry (2017), former head of Dame Alice Harpur School in Bedford, argues instead that the mind-set should shift from one of producing lengthy individual lesson plans to 'prove you're doing your job' to planning focusing on 'thinking, evaluating, adapting, improving'.

PLANNING MYTHS

Let's then debunk some of the myths associated with planning. The National Education Union (NEU) (2017) helpfully identified five important myths:

1. Sharing planning and resources and using other peoples doesn't make anyone an ineffective teacher. The key is being able to use the time to adapt these to suit the needs of your class; rather than spending a disproportionate amount of time re-inventing the wheel yourself;
2. Spending lots of time making a resource for yourself doesn't make you a better teacher. Look at resources that already exist. Shift your mind-set from making your own resources to evaluating the quality of existing resources and considering how they can be used to support your teaching;
3. Using high quality text books doesn't make you a lazy teacher, nor does it replace your professional knowledge and skill. Clearly this is dependent on stability within the curriculum – textbooks are a significant investment and with a squeeze on school budgets and worries about texts becoming quickly out of date due to curriculum changes it is no wonder that fewer than 10% of teachers in the UK use textbooks in their lessons.
4. Ofsted does not require an individual lesson plan produced for a lesson observed during an inspection. Nor do they want to see a folder full of previous lesson plans from teachers;

5. A lesson plan, by itself, does not indicate good teaching. Looking at a lesson plan in isolation often bears little relation to what happens in the classroom. With this in mind, Myatt (2016) argues for an end to teachers having to produce compulsory lesson plans. She goes on to point out that impact on pupil learning cannot be judged by simply looking at someone's lesson plan.

Many of the above points chime with the findings of the Department for Education's Independent Review on planning (2016b) which also identified that planning a sequence of lessons was far more important than teachers spending lots of time writing individual and often highly detailed lesson plans. In other words; teachers need to focus more on planning pupils' learning over a period of time rather than splitting it into individual lessons.

When considering planning in your context it is often worth reflecting on Hattie's (2012:37) advice and how this can be translated into practice for you:

'Planning can be done in many ways, but the most powerful is when teachers work together to develop plans, develop common understandings of what is worth teaching, collaborate on understanding their beliefs of challenge and progress and work together to evaluate the impact of their planning on student outcome.'

KEY INFORMATION

Why Textbooks Count - A policy Paper by Tim Oates

<http://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/181744-why-textbooks-count-tim-oates.pdf>

It is worth reading Oate's policy paper where he puts forward a convincing argument behind the role that textbooks could play in supporting effective teaching whilst also reducing teacher workload. The paper challenges what Nick Gibb refers to as the 'Ideological hostility' in primary schools to the use of textbooks.

OTHER IMPORTANT STRATEGIES

CRITICAL QUESTION

What are some of the strategies that will help you to manage your workload?

Being an effective teacher requires you to develop habits and strategies so that you spend your time and energy on the things that help you become better as a teacher and also on those that have the most impact on the pupils in your class. It would be false for me to say that teaching doesn't have its highs and lows – what job doesn't? Yes, it can also be stressful at times and there will be pinch points in the academic year. There are, however, some important steps that you can take to help you.

MANAGING YOUR TIME:

Managing your time is an important skill to master. An important habit to develop is to set limits to both your working day and also time limits for specific tasks. It is really important that you are strict with this. Remember, there is no need or expectation for you to be the first one in school every morning and the last one to leave. This will soon take its toll on you so start as you mean to go on. As you know, teaching is one of those professions where there is always something else to do so it's important for you develop these habits and self-discipline to avoid work taking control of you. Also identify when you are at your most productive and try to maximise what you do during this time.

Managing your time also means ensuring that you build in 'me time'. Remember, you work really hard so it's important that you factor in time for your hobbies and ring-fence this.

PRIORITISING TASKS:

Stephen Covey popularised the concept of prioritising your workload with his self-help matrix.

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	Quadrant 1: Urgent & important	Quadrant 2: Not urgent & important
NOT IMPORTANT	Quadrant 3: Urgent & not important	Quadrant 4: Not urgent & not important

Covey's matrix is designed to help you organise your priorities so that you can manage your available time more effectively. The idea behind the matrix is to prioritise your tasks in relation to their importance and urgency; helping you to make decisions about whether you need to address a particular task immediately or if it can wait.

Urgent and Important: It's important to distinguish here between the two types of urgent and important – often they fall into two categories – unforeseen / unexpected and also the tasks that you have left until the last minute. Clearly you can't foresee the unexpected but they will occur and it's therefore important that you factor in time when you may need to handle unforeseen events. When these occur you'll need to make use of your time management skills. For those tasks that you've left until the last minute – well – the obvious point here is avoid these by planning ahead and utilising the strategies mentioned above about managing your time.

Important but not urgent: An example of this could be marking some homework. Yes, it's important but as you don't need to give it back to your pupils for a few days you can plan in time to undertake this task. The important point here is to make sure that you plan in the time to do these tasks – and stick to it – to avoid them suddenly becoming urgent. Scheduling tasks into your working week will maximise your chances of using your time most effectively, avoiding unnecessary stress and not letting your workload take control of you.

Finally the last two quadrants: When considering those urgent but not important tasks think about how you can streamline, reduce or delegate some of these. Sometimes for teachers it's really hard to identify not important tasks – aren't all the tasks that we do important? I'd suggest that they aren't. Sometimes these tasks may

be important to others but not for you in relation to the other priorities and deadlines you have. Remember – think to yourself – are these tasks positively impacting on the quality of my teaching and on the pupils in my class. If they aren't why are you doing them? Now, for those not urgent and not important tasks. In teaching these are sometimes what I like to refer to as the 'icing on the cake' tasks. Whilst it may be lovely to laminate all the children's exercise books ask yourself, could I be using my time more effectively?

CLASSROOM LINK

What does this mean for your classroom practice?

- Consider all the typical activities you perform during the working week. Try to be specific.
- Which of these activities take up more time than they should?
- Are there ways that you could reduce this?
- Now begin to categorise the activities according to the quadrants. Look ahead to tasks and deadlines in the term/academic year.
- How can you build in time for these before they become urgent and important?

The trick, as Bubb (2014) rightly points out, is not to be a perfectionist – you have to think to yourself that 'good enough' will do. Prioritise the essential tasks and keep on-top of these.

TO CONCLUDE

Teaching, whilst hugely rewarding does have its challenges. What profession though doesn't have challenges? Within this chapter we have explored some of the challenges concerning teacher workload which, quite frankly shouldn't be there. I hope that in reading this you realise that teaching doesn't have to be a 24/7 profession. There are alternative ways which; importantly positively impact on pupil learning and progress AND reduce unnecessary workload burdens for teachers. Estelle Morris, a former Secretary of State for Education said in 2002; 'A tired teacher is not an effective teacher. Nor is that teacher allowed to focus on what is most important – teaching'.

ASSIGNMENTS

If you are writing an ITT assignment on teacher workload it will be useful for you to think through the following:

1. What are some of the internal and external factors which both positively and / or negatively impact on teacher workload?

2. What is the research and evidence base surrounding effective feedback, planning and resourcing? How can this support you with your workload?
3. What other strategies are there to support teachers to effectively manage their workload and work efficiently?
4. How have schools been addressing workload concerns?

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