



Department
for Education

Teacher Workload Survey 2019

Research brief

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Social Science in Government

The Teacher Workload Survey 2019

Background

This research brief summarises the findings from the Teacher Workload Survey (TWS) 2019, which is a large-scale nationally representative survey of teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders, conducted over a three-week period in March 2019. The survey helps act as a national ‘barometer’ for teachers’, middle leaders’ and senior leaders’ working conditions and forms a key part of the Department for Education’s (DfE) commitment to improving the evidence base on what drives unnecessary teacher workload and what works to reduce it. This brief is accompanied by a full report and technical report.

Survey method

An online survey was administered in a sample of primary, secondary and special schools across England. A probability proportionate to size (PPS) method was used to randomly select schools, with the probability of selection into the sample proportionate to the number of teachers in the school¹. In total, 1,203 schools were selected and approached. Of these schools, 449 agreed to take part in the survey and distributed the survey link to all teaching staff, representing a total of 20,704 teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders. After removing responses from non-teaching staff and further data cleaning, the final sample comprised 7,287 teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders from 404 schools. This represented a 35 per cent response rate at the teacher/leader level among schools that agreed to participate. Overall, the majority of characteristics (including demographic and school characteristics) for teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders responding to the survey were similar to the average for the overall population of teaching staff, as described by the School Workforce Census (SWC). To address any differences, the data have been weighted to reflect the national population of teachers from the SWC.

¹ Further information about the PPS approach can be found in Annex 1 of the Technical Report.

Comparisons with TWS 2016

Findings from the TWS 2019 are compared to those from the TWS 2016² to measure trends over time. Some caution is advised when interpreting these comparisons, due to small wording changes to the 2019 survey, and efforts to minimise response bias, both of which may partly account for differences between the two surveys³.

Key findings

Teachers', middle leaders' and senior leaders' overall working hours

Teachers and middle leaders report working fewer hours in total in 2019 than they did in 2016.

The average total, self-reported working hours in the reference week for all teachers and middle leaders in 2019 was 49.5 hours, down 4.9 hours from the 54.4 hours reported in 2016. Total recorded working hours in the reference week for all primary teachers and middle leaders in the 2019 survey was 50.0 hours per week on average, down 5.5 hours from the 55.5 hours reported in 2016. Total working hours were also lower for secondary teachers and middle leaders, down 4.4 hours from 53.5 in 2016 to 49.1 in 2019.

Consistent with previous teacher workload studies, primary teachers and middle leaders work longer hours than their colleagues in secondary schools, although this difference has fallen from 2.0 hours on average per week since 2016, to 0.9 hours.

The number of hours teachers and middle leaders report working out-of-school hours has fallen, both in terms of the average number of hours worked, and as a proportion of total working hours.

Primary teachers and middle leaders reported working an average of 12.5 hours during weekends, evenings or other out-of-school hours, while secondary teachers and middle leaders reported working an average of 13.1 out-of-school hours. These are respectively 5.0 and 3.8 hours lower compared to 2016. In addition, between 2016 and 2019, the time teachers and middle leaders reported working during weekends, evenings or other out-of-school hours fell as a proportion of their total working hours. For primary teachers and middle leaders, the proportion of time spent working out-of-school hours was down 7

² Higton, J., Leonardi, S., Richards, N., Choudhury, A., Sofroniou, N., and Owen, D. (2017). *Teacher Workload Survey 2016: Final report* [online]. Available: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592499/TWS_2016_FINAL_Research_report_Feb_2017.pdf [15 July, 2019].

³ Further information can be found in the main report accompanying this brief.

percentage points to 25 per cent, and for secondary teachers and middle leaders, this was down 6 percentage points to 26 per cent.

Senior leaders also reported working fewer hours in total in 2019 than they did in 2016.

Across all schools, senior leaders reported working an average total of 55.1 hours in the reference week in 2019. This is down 5.4 hours from the 60.5⁴ hours reported in 2016. Total recorded working hours in the reference week for primary senior leaders in the 2019 survey was 54.4 hours per week, down 5.4 hours from the 59.8 hours reported in 2016. Total working hours were also lower for secondary senior leaders, down 5.7 hours from 62.1 in 2016 to 56.4 in 2019.

The findings suggest that secondary senior leaders continue to work longer hours, on average, than their counterparts in primary schools. However, this difference has fallen slightly from 2.3 hours on average in 2016, to 2.0 hours in 2019.

Hours spent teaching

Primary and secondary teachers and middle leaders reported spending broadly similar amounts of time on teaching in 2019 as they did in 2016.

In total, teachers and middle leaders reported spending an average of 21.3 hours teaching in the reference week in 2019 compared to 21.6 hours in 2016. Primary teachers and middle leaders reported spending an average of 22.9 hours on teaching in the reference week. This figure is broadly comparable with the 23.1 hours reported in 2016. Secondary teachers and middle leaders reported spending an average of 19.9 hours on teaching in the reference week. This figure is broadly comparable with the 20.3 hours reported in 2016.

Most of the reduction between 2016 and 2019 in teachers' and middle leaders' total reported working hours is therefore attributable to less time being spent by teachers and middle leaders on non-teaching activities, as described below.

Hours spent on non-teaching activities

Most primary and secondary teachers and middle leaders reported spending less time on lesson planning, marking and pupil supervision in 2019 than in 2016.

⁴ Updated analysis has identified a typographical error in the TWS 2016 report (page 6). The reported figure of senior leaders working an average of 60.0 hours in the reference week should be 60.5 hours. The underlying data, other analysis and findings of the report remain unchanged.

Compared to 2016, primary and secondary teachers and middle leaders reported spending fewer hours on 'individual planning/preparation of lessons' (down 1.3 hours and 1.1 hours respectively), 'marking/correcting of pupils' work' (down 2.2 hours and 1.7 hours respectively), and 'undertaking pupil supervision and tuition' (down 1.8 hours and 1.3 hours respectively). Smaller reductions were also reported in the 'recording, inputting, monitoring and analysis of pupil data' (down 0.5 hours in the primary phase and 0.6 hours for the secondary phase). Reductions in teachers' and middle leaders' reported working hours are concentrated in DfE's areas of focus following the 2014 Workload Challenge. It seems quite possible that the work of the three independent workload review groups and the resulting support and guidance for schools, have contributed to the reductions reported.

However, despite these reductions, most primary teachers and middle leaders said they still felt they spent too much time on planning, marking and data management, alongside general administrative work. Similarly, most secondary teachers and middle leaders reported spending too much time on marking, data management and general administrative work. The findings therefore suggest that there remains further work to do in reducing the amount of time teachers spend on these activities.

Different working practices between phases are reflected in the proportion of primary and secondary teachers and middle leaders who undertook different professional activities, and in the amount of time they spent on them.

For example, primary teachers and middle leaders were more likely to say they undertook 'communication and co-operation with parents or guardians' and were much less likely to undertake 'pupil supervision and tuition', and 'pupil discipline, including detentions', compared to secondary teachers and middle leaders.

Perceptions of workload

Primary teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders were less likely than those in the secondary phase to say that workload was a 'very' serious problem.

Fewer respondents reported that workload was a 'very serious problem' in 2019 than in 2016: in 2019, 21 per cent of primary respondents and 37 per cent of secondary respondents reported that workload was 'a very serious problem', compared with 49 per cent and 56 per cent in 2016 respectively. However, more respondents viewed workload as a 'fairly serious problem' in 2019 than in 2016: in 2019, 52 per cent of primary respondents and 50 per cent of secondary respondents reported that teacher workload was 'a fairly serious problem', compared with 42 per cent and 39 per cent in 2016 respectively.

As was the case in 2016, there is a clear association between teachers', middle leaders' and senior leaders' views on the extent to which they consider workload to be a serious

problem in their school and the hours they worked in the reference week. Differences were also found by role: middle leaders were more likely to state workload was a 'very' serious problem (34 per cent compared with 29 per cent of teachers and 20 per cent of senior leaders).

Most respondents reported that they could not complete their workload within their contracted hours, that they did not have an acceptable workload, and that they did not achieve a good work-life balance.

Seventy per cent of primary teachers and middle leaders reported that they 'strongly disagreed' with the statement 'I can complete my assigned workload during my contracted hours', while about three out of ten 'strongly disagreed' with the statements, 'I have an acceptable workload' (29 per cent) and, 'overall, I achieve a good balance between my work life and my private life' (30 per cent). The equivalent figures for secondary teachers and middle leaders were 76 per cent, 40 per cent, and 38 per cent respectively.

These findings represent a notable improvement on those reported in 2016. For example, the proportion of primary teachers and middle leaders reporting they 'strongly disagreed' with the statement, 'I have an acceptable workload', dropped by 30 percentage points, down from 59 per cent in 2016. It is also still the case that those who strongly disagreed with these statements (and therefore had a negative view of their workload) reported working more hours per week and more out-of-school hours. Middle leaders were more likely to strongly disagree with these statements, alongside respondents in Ofsted-category *Requires Improvement* or *Inadequate* schools.

Working environments in schools

Senior leaders reported that schools use a range of different strategies to try to manage and plan professional time.

The most common strategies are statutory protected blocks of non-teaching time and encouraging staff to work collaboratively to plan schemes of work. Senior leaders were generally much less likely to report having a committee in place that monitors teachers' workloads.

Most teachers, middle and senior leaders were positive about the professional development time and support they receive.

Most respondents agreed they had the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills needed to perform data recording and analysis tasks, that their schools supported continuing professional development (CPD), and that they had time during their contracted working hours to take part in professional development activities.

However, they disagreed that they had enough time to keep informed of changes to guidance and rules affecting professional practice.

Overall, over half of all respondents agreed that their schools' working environments allow them to collaborate effectively on teaching and learning and to address disciplinary problems, that lesson observations are an effective part of professional development, and that teaching assistants (TAs) are effectively deployed. Respondents in Ofsted-category *Good* and *Outstanding* schools are more likely than those in *Requires Improvement* or *Inadequate* schools to agree that TAs are deployed effectively, as are those in primaries compared to those in secondaries.

Most teachers, middle and senior leaders reported that their schools had made efforts to change their policies and approaches to reduce workload, but that these had met with mixed success to date.

Most respondents (55 per cent or more) in both primary and secondary schools reported that approaches to data tracking, school behaviour, marking and feedback, and teacher appraisal had all been changed in the last two years as part of a specific attempt to reduce workload. However, in most cases, only a minority (typically around 20 per cent or less) of those working in schools that had changed these approaches felt these changes had resulted in a reduction in their workload, with notable minorities reporting they had actually added to their workload. The one exception was changes to primary schools' marking and feedback policies, which four out of ten primary respondents (40 per cent) reported had resulted in reductions to their workload.

Conclusions

The findings from the TWS 2019 suggest there has been a reduction between 2016 and 2019 in teachers', middle leaders' and senior leaders' reported working hours in the reference week. Small differences between the content and administration of the two surveys may partly account for any differences between the two surveys. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that there has been a genuine fall in the average working hours reported by teachers, middle leaders and senior leaders. The reductions in respondents' reported working hours are concentrated in the areas of focus for the 2016 independent teacher workload review groups (marking, planning and teaching resources, and data management) and the 2018 Teacher Workload Advisory Group (data management). The 2019 survey was also administered after the July 2018 publication of the DfE's workload reduction toolkit for schools. It is possible that the support and guidance for schools produced by these groups, and included in the toolkit, has contributed to falls in teachers' workload. However, with about seven out of ten primary respondents and nine out of ten secondary respondents still reporting workload is a 'fairly' or 'very' serious problem, it is also clear that there is more work to do to reduce unnecessary workload for teachers, middle leaders, and school leaders.



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