



Department  
for Education

# **Exploring teacher workload: qualitative research**

**Research report**

**March 2018**

**CooperGibson Research**

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## Executive Summary

In response to its Workload Challenge<sup>1</sup>, the Department for Education (DfE) made a commitment in 2015 to undertake a regular large scale and robust survey of teacher workload in schools in England – known as the Teacher Workload Survey (TWS).

As a follow-up to the TWS 2016, this qualitative project has gathered evidence of the factors that were reported to be associated with longer working hours, how teachers perceive their workload and how schools are seeking to address these issues.

Seventy five in-depth qualitative telephone interviews were undertaken with a range of teachers and senior leaders in July and August 2017.<sup>2</sup> This included:

- 21 senior leaders.
- 28 full-time teachers with up to five years in the profession (early career teachers).
- 14 full-time teachers with over eleven years' experience.
- 12 part-time teachers.

Interviewees represented a range of phases and subjects.

## Levels of Workload

Interviewees reported high levels of workload, with early career teachers and senior leaders most commonly stating that their workload was unmanageable. Often teachers said that their level of workload was only manageable because of the long hours that they worked.

The common reasons for workload were given by senior leaders and teachers as<sup>3</sup>:

- Administration.
- Behaviour monitoring and safeguarding.
- Changing GCSE and A-Level specifications.
- Data tracking.
- Marking and assessment.
- Planning and meetings.

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<sup>1</sup> DfE (2015), 'Workload Challenge: analysis of responses':

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workload-challenge-analysis-of-teacher-responses>

<sup>2</sup> Interviews were carried out in August 2017 where these dates were requested by participants.

<sup>3</sup> Multiple reasons for perceived high levels of workload were provided by participants. These reasons are not therefore presented in order of importance.

Supporting the findings of previous workload surveys, many interviewees acknowledged that the tasks that they undertook were all important and necessary aspects of school life. It was the volume of tasks that they felt to be unmanageable in the time available to them, particularly when data entry and depth marking was required for each individual learner, learning objective and module/unit of work.

## **Workload Drivers**

Just over half of interviewees noted that workload pressures were driven by high expectations set by members of their Senior Leadership Team (SLT), although it was also acknowledged that SLTs had their own heavy workloads often driven by external requirements such as Ofsted. There was a general perception among teachers of all types that there were 'mixed messages' between Ofsted requirements, the experience of receiving Ofsted feedback and the daily expectations within schools in terms of recording evidence. The attitude, communications and expectations of SLT members was one of the common factors that determined a teacher's response to workload pressures. Where teachers reported feeling a positive level of support and acknowledgement from SLT members, there appeared to be some link with perceptions of workload being relatively more manageable. The teachers that felt 'disconnected' from SLT appeared to be less positive about managing their workload pressures.

Senior leaders in secondary schools noted that drivers of workload could differ by Department or Faculty. Managing part-time staff was also reported to create additional workload by eight senior leaders, for example timetabling complexities. However, senior leaders generally reported that introducing part-time opportunities had enabled their schools to retain talented teachers that may otherwise leave.

## **Workload Patterns**

Both senior leaders and teachers reported that there were 'pinch points' for workload throughout the school year. These tended to be: the start of the school year, Christmas, the run-up to exam periods and end-of-year reporting.

Teachers in secondary schools acknowledged that workload in summer can lighten. Nonetheless, interviewees reported that this time can then be taken over by tasks such as providing lesson cover for other years. For primary teachers, the summer term was perceived to be especially busy due to end-of-year reporting and extra-curricular events.

## **Accountability**

Senior leaders were asked what types of records staff were being asked to keep. Their responses reflected those of teachers, and commonly included continuous updates of data, reports of lesson plans and evidence of tasks set and decisions made.

Teachers noted frustration when they were asked to complete reporting tasks that did not appear to directly inform teaching and learning, or to improve outcomes for children. Software systems used for recording staff performance were felt by teachers to be complex. Even though they understood the benefits of being able to track performance, these teachers felt that using new software introduced by the school, without sufficient training, meant that the process added negatively to their workload.

## **Workload Management Strategies**

Teachers and senior leaders were asked what approaches they take to managing their workload or work/life balance. Where they could identify specific strategies that they used, these were:

- Controlling working hours.
- Administrative self-discipline.
- Using pre-existing resources.

All part-time teachers reported that they had reduced their hours to, or maintained, their part-time contracts in order to manage workload. They all said that they used their non-working week days as additional time to cover administrative tasks.

Furthermore, the strategies that had been implemented across whole schools, or within Departments (rather than just by individual teachers) were most commonly:

- Reduction in reporting requirements.
- Encouraging collaboration.
- New marking and planning strategies.
- Use of specific software packages.
- Increased focus on staff wellbeing.
- Developing homework strategies.
- Limiting working hours.
- Additional administrative and/or specialist staff.

Examples that interviewees gave for these strategies are detailed in section 3.

Those in senior leadership positions felt that they needed to invest time and effort into reviewing policies and procedures in schools and this in itself added to workload, but those who had taken the step felt that there had been reductions in workload as a result.

## Perceived Impact of Workload Management Strategies

Where classroom-based strategies have been put in place – such as new marking policies, reduction in report writing, and using specialist software – interviewees of all types reported that these had reduced the number of hours that they spent on each task.

In addition, broader strategies that focused on sharing resources/collaboration, acknowledging the efforts of staff and promoting wellbeing across the school workforce, were viewed as being beneficial in reducing stress and anxiety levels whilst developing positive relationships among staff members.

## SLT Support

The influence of SLT attitudes towards workload reduction was a significant factor for many teachers taking part in the qualitative interviews. Forty four teachers gave a view about levels of support from SLT. Of these:

- Nineteen teachers reported that they felt very supported and that they could approach the SLT with workload concerns.
- Fourteen teachers reported feeling ambivalent towards the level of support they received; they felt neither supported nor unsupported with their workload.
- Eleven teachers said that pressure received from SLT was high and that there was a lack of understanding of the challenges they faced; they did not feel supported by SLT and said that they would not approach them for support.

Senior leaders noted that it was important for SLT members to communicate clear messages to wider teaching staff, to ensure that the school workforce feels valued. They felt that simple strategies such as regularly acknowledging the time and effort made by staff worked well in maintaining morale and boosting attitudes towards workload.

## Early Career Teachers

The majority of early career teachers said that there was not any specific coverage of workload management during their training. There was also a general perception that teacher training did not provide a realistic impression of day-to-day teaching workload.

Most of those with a mentor had appreciated the regular contact with another member of staff, although some recognised that their mentors were also very busy or that the mentor could not address levels of workload. However, where this relationship worked well, there were clear benefits to new entrants into the profession. This included learning how to:

- Plan, particularly mid-term.
- Adapt resources.
- Locate pre-existing resources effectively.

- Learn from mistakes and develop reflective practice.

## Support for Senior Leaders

Most senior leaders attended headteacher and leadership network meetings, local partnerships or collaborations. These networks were used for peer support, accessing contacts for formal peer review arrangements, as well as informal support and sharing experiences.

However, senior leaders commonly pointed out that network meetings in themselves did not reduce workload: attending them, organising visits or conducting peer reviews could ultimately increase workload. As much as they mentioned their workload levels during these meetings, they reported that there was little directly implemented through these networks to find ways to reduce workload – it was perceived to be part of the role that would not change.

## Workload Reports

Participants provided mixed responses when they were asked about the DfE's workload review reports. Full-time early career teachers were more likely to have read the reports than other teachers.

Most senior leaders said that they had not implemented specific initiatives as a result of the workload review reports. However, a few said the reports had directly contributed to a whole school review of workload and changes taking place, including integration of workload into School Development Plans. Some interviewees felt that the guidance included in the reports would change in the future, and this made them reluctant to spend time implementing new strategies.<sup>4</sup>

## Professional Development

When they spoke about access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or advice specifically to aid workload reduction, 31 teachers said that they had not accessed it; an additional 18 had accessed CPD courses or advice. Senior leaders did not feel that there was very much support on managing workload available to them.

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<sup>4</sup> Use of the Workload Review Group reports was also included in the most recent teacher voice omnibus survey: DfE (2017), '[Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey – July 2017](#)', which found that more than a third of senior leaders responding to the survey (36 per cent) had used the independent reports on marking, planning and resources and/or data management as a basis to review current policies. However, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of senior leaders said that they had used none of the methods included in the survey.

The most commonly mentioned resource was internal training led by experienced members of staff. This included sharing good practice, setting up teaching and learning groups to discuss good practice, implementing staggered marking and 'smart teaching'.

Although this CPD was not always directly related to reducing workload, several of the teachers felt that the skills they developed helped them to manage that workload more effectively. However, there were concerns that internal training sessions were delivered in such a way that was critical of teacher performance, or suggested ideas that were not always realistic in terms of their day-to-day implementation. Others suggested that CPD could be repetitive and lack relevance to their subject.

Examples of the types of development teachers would appreciate in the future to help them manage workload are listed in section 5.2.



# 1. Introduction and Approach

In 2015, in response to the Workload Challenge, the Department for Education (DfE) made a commitment to undertake a large scale and robust survey of teacher workload in schools in England in the spring term, every two years. The first wave of a bespoke Teacher Workload Survey (TWS) ran in March 2016. The survey report was published in February 2017, alongside an action plan, which provided an update on work and set out further commitments acting on the findings from the survey. This included continuing to use the data provided by the TWS 2016 to develop further evidence around factors which lead to high workload.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.1 Teacher Workload Research

As a follow-up to the TWS 2016, the DfE commissioned this project to explore teacher workload qualitatively. This project has aimed to gather evidence in further detail of the factors that were reported to be associated with longer working hours, how teachers view their workload and how schools are seeking to address these issues.

## 1.2 Methodology

A total of 75 in-depth qualitative telephone interviews were undertaken with a range of teachers and senior leaders in July and August<sup>6</sup> 2017.

The interviews explored a range of issues including:

- Experiences of workload and personal strategies and approaches to managing it.
- School approaches to addressing workload issues and the perceived effect that these strategies have on teachers.
- Examples of specific strategies for managing time and wellbeing that have been introduced in schools.
- Part-time teachers' perceptions of how working part-time impacts on relative workload and school approaches to flexible working.
- The experiences of early career teachers in managing workload expectations

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<sup>5</sup> For the Workload Challenge report, see DfE (2015), 'Workload Challenge: analysis of responses': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/workload-challenge-analysis-of-teacher-responses>; for the workload review reports, see DfE (2017), 'Reducing teacher workload': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>; for the workload survey report, see DfE (2017), 'Teacher workload survey 2016': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-workload-survey-2016>

<sup>6</sup> Interviews were carried out in August 2017 where these dates were requested by participants.

- Types of support and professional development that have been accessed by teachers and senior leaders to tackle workload issues.

Teachers and senior leaders were contacted by email, requesting their participation in the interviews. This was then followed-up by telephone to book convenient appointment times for each interview. Interviews tended to take between 25 and 45 minutes depending on respondent type and the workload management strategies that were in place in their schools.

### 1.3 Sample

The sample was derived from those teachers and senior leaders who took part in the TWS 2016, and provided their email address for the purpose of follow-up research.<sup>7</sup> They were contacted in March 2017 by the DfE to notify them that follow-up work would be undertaken, and offer them the opportunity to opt out. For the remaining participants information (as assessed for the TWS in March 2016) was held about:

- Their survey responses (e.g. reported working hours and attitudes to workload).
- School-level characteristics of these former participants (e.g. school phase, LA / geographical region and if schools had strategies in place for managing and planning professional time (as reported by senior leaders)).
- Several individual-level characteristics (e.g. their role, whether they are less-experienced teachers, full-/part-time teachers, if applicable, which subjects they are teaching on a regular basis).

Based on the available information, the sample was drawn by CooperGibson Research so that it included participants from both primary and secondary schools, covering the following subgroups for each phase: less experienced (up to five years in the profession) and more experienced classroom teachers, part-time and full-time teachers and senior leaders.

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<sup>7</sup> Their responses have been anonymised throughout.

**Table 1: Interview respondents by role.**

	<b>Sample achieved</b>
Headteachers/Deputy or Assistant Headteachers:	21
<i>Headteacher</i>	10
<i>Deputy Headteacher</i>	3
<i>Assistant Headteacher/Principal</i>	7
<i>Executive Principal</i>	1
Full-time teachers with up to five years in the profession	28
Full-time teachers with more than eleven years in teaching	14
Part-time teachers	12

The participants included 25 interviewees from primary schools and 50 from secondary schools. Those in secondary schools taught a range of subjects:

- 12 humanities teachers (including English, Geography, History).
- 9 science teachers (including combined sciences, and separate science subjects).
- 5 mathematics teachers.
- 5 teachers across a range of applied subjects including art and design, business, media studies, health and social care and physical education.
- 4 design and technology teachers (including ICT).
- 3 performing arts teachers (including drama and music).
- 2 Special Educational Needs (SEN) specialists.

The remainder of teachers/leaders interviewed from secondary schools were individuals without teaching roles (i.e. solely leadership roles).

## 2. Workload Drivers

This section details the perceptions that teachers and senior leaders had in relation to the tasks that affected their workload levels, the drivers for these tasks and the patterns in workload that occur throughout the academic year.

### 2.1 Level of Current Workload

Overall, interview participants reported having high levels of workload – although they were not asked during this project to formally measure the number of hours worked. This ranged from specific areas of workload being perceived as problematic through to the level of workload in general being considered totally unmanageable. The latter perspective came most commonly from full-time teachers who had been in teaching for less than five years, and senior leaders.

- All senior leaders across school types reported that their overall workload was heavy. Although nine of the twenty-one interviewed noted that their workload was 'manageable', they tended to state this was because they consistently worked long hours. Responses from senior leaders when asked to describe their workload ranged from there being particularly busy periods of each year or term (e.g. when reports were due for Governors, local authority advisors or data tracking points), to feeling as if their role had become akin to 'crisis' management much of the time.
- Full-time teachers with more than eleven years of teaching experience commonly reported that specific areas of their workload had become problematic, such as data tracking, administration and marking, rather than considering the entirety of their workload being unmanageable.
- Full-time teachers with less than five years' experience were split evenly in terms of how they perceived their workload levels (i.e. half of the twenty eight interviewed said it was manageable, half felt that it was not manageable). Those who found their workload manageable gave reasons for this: they did not have family responsibilities and/or care commitments, they chose to work 'long' hours, or that they had put in place a workable solution to share working arrangements (e.g. sharing planning with colleagues).
- All part-time teachers interviewed considered their workload to be high, but manageable, because they had purposefully chosen to reduce (or maintain) their paid working hours. For example, those who had initially changed to part-time hours due to family commitments had chosen to remain part-time, because of the additional workload that moving to a full-time contract would create. All part-time teachers reported that they worked on their non-working week days. They perceived their workload to be manageable specifically because they had this additional time at home to cover administrative work – they tended to regard it as unpaid planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time.

## 2.1.1 Reasons for High Levels of Workload

Participants were asked what had been the key contributors to their workload over the course of the academic year. Their responses generally reflected the findings in the TWS 2016, with a series of common issues highlighted. These are summarised below.

### Administration

This included a broad range of tasks, but commonly mentioned was the high volume of emails that senior leadership teams (SLT) expected responses from quickly (e.g. within 24 hours). Email workload was regarded as being especially challenging by teachers whose school permitted direct email communication from parents and/or students to individual members of teaching staff (rather than filtering queries through an administrator first). The high volume of paperwork for SEN learners (e.g. Education, Health and Care Plans (ECHPs)) was mentioned by seven interviewees, also maintaining knowledge on changing rules and regulations such as funding requirements. Heads of Department or year group particularly mentioned the level of administration required with that role, such as data tracking and line management processes and the volume of paperwork required for risk assessments (e.g. for school trips).

*'I am responsible for the Foundation Stage learners, so this means that I carry out 60+ assessments and have to report back to progress meetings. Where children are identified as not making enough progress, there are intervention groups set up and then we have to track their data also, so that we can answer what progress has been made by each child. This is ongoing continually. Then there is the Pupil Tracker. I have to input the data for 17 areas of learning for each pupil onto the tracker'. (Part-time primary school teacher with more than 11 years' experience)*

### Behaviour monitoring

Secondary school teachers in particular reported a large volume of paperwork and/or time taken up having to manage unforeseen safeguarding events and/or sudden disciplinary issues that need addressing immediately, and then the record-keeping required as a result. These then had a knock-on effect on other tasks that were subsequently not addressed as planned. Senior leaders particularly highlighted the unforeseen nature of some tasks, including dealing with safeguarding issues, as problematic.

### Changes to specifications

Simultaneous changes in GCSE and A-level specifications were reported to be a common driver of workload among secondary teachers, particularly as this also coincided with the change in the assessment grading system to 9-1 rather than A\*-G at GCSE.

## Data tracking

Interviewees reported requirements from schools that they should log data for individual pupils across subjects and for specific learning objectives within subjects. Common responses across teacher types included the duplication of data reporting in different software systems and regular data tracking to monitor specific cohorts such as Pupil Premium and/or SEN groups. Several teachers felt that software systems were complex or they were not properly trained to use software to its greatest effect (for more detail on data, evidence and accountability see section 2.3).

## Marking and assessment

The need to show differentiation – e.g. using different colour paper and pens – was regarded as time-consuming; triple impact marking was viewed as particularly onerous by those required to adopt this approach. The volume and frequency of marking was highlighted by 31 teachers across all phases/subjects as a specific workload burden (e.g. mathematics teachers reported having to mark books very regularly; teachers in the humanities had a high volume of written work to assess for each student).

## Planning and meetings

Eleven teaching staff reported a lack of PPA time available for lesson planning. This included three that suggested they had lost some statutory PPA time in order to provide cover for colleagues, whilst others felt that 10% PPA time was inadequate for the amount of planning and administrative work required. Others perceived the number of staff meetings to be high, particularly where meetings were perceived to not have a key purpose. There were mixed responses in terms of forward planning and whether these strategies added to workload unnecessarily (some teachers and senior leaders felt that in-depth planning was an effective workload management strategy – see section 3).

Supporting the findings of previous workload surveys, many interviewees acknowledged that the tasks they undertook during the working week were all important and necessary aspects of school life. What was perceived to be creating an ‘unmanageable’ workload among interviewees was the number of individual learners and/or classes for which each of the tasks needed to be carried out, in comparison to the time available in which to do them.

*‘We had an assessment policy with three feedback comments – it’s useful feedback, but it’s time consuming to write the three comments for thirty students after you’ve marked the test. It takes hours. None of what we were asking was unreasonable, they were all useful things to do; it’s just that when you multiply it by student numbers it’s very time consuming’* (Full-time secondary school science teacher with over 11 years’ experience)

Interviewees in primary schools commonly highlighted the volume of marking, assessment and planning as contributing to their workload levels; the length of end-of-

year reports was also a significant issue for many, although this may have been a reflection of the time of year that the fieldwork was carried out. Some primary school teachers indicated that each individual report could be up to 12-pages long and was required to include photographs. In-depth marking in each workbook was also perceived to be specifically onerous among primary school teachers. Secondary school teachers appeared more likely to state that marking policies had been amended to try to tackle the workload associated with marking within Departments/schools (see section 3), and their common drivers of high workload were data tracking and accountability (e.g. recording/maintaining evidence), administration (especially the high volume of emails) and paperwork related to behavioural/pastoral issues.

Related to working to exam board criteria, two teachers delivering Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses reported a high workload due to coursework being '*marked in a specific and prescribed way*' that was deemed to be very time-consuming. The additional administration in terms of notifying exam boards of the dates that individual units and assignments will be covered and submitted was also perceived to be onerous on teaching staff.

Just over half of interviewees noted that workload pressures were driven by high expectations set by members of the SLT. For example, some teachers reported receiving criticism from SLT where they did not reply to emails during the evenings and weekends.

*'Parents now email staff directly and we are expected to reply within 24 hours. Students email and we have to reply to them individually outside of school hours, for example forwarding homework tasks or answering queries about homework. I am expected to answer emails from SLT [during] lessons I am teaching. If I don't I am questioned as to why I've not responded. I can have hundreds in a day, the turnaround expectations are high'. (Part-time secondary school maths teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

Nonetheless, several teachers also acknowledged that SLT members have their own heavy workloads and are driven by external pressures such as Ofsted. When interviewed, senior leaders regarded the main drivers of their workload as being the implementation of new initiatives and strategies, curriculum changes, dealing with safeguarding issues, assessment periods and data points. However, the attitude, communications and expectations of SLT members appeared to be one of the common factors that determined a teacher's response to workload pressures.

*'The head does take on some things [about workload] such as planning, marking and meetings, this has been really useful. But he is a data man. It's an obsession of his driven by the fear of Ofsted. It creates huge work for everyone else. All SLTs have ideas, which makes for a lot of ideas in total. If something is added, something ought to be taken away'. (Full-time primary school teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

There was also a general perception among teachers of all types that there were ‘mixed messages’ between Ofsted requirements, the experience of receiving Ofsted feedback and the daily expectations within schools in terms of recording evidence.

*‘I know that Ofsted inspectors don’t want this level of data collection, nor does the government. [The workload] driven by fearful middle management and heads with not enough control over them’. (Part-time secondary school teacher with over 11 years’ experience)*

Several teachers noted frustration that even if Ofsted did not require specific marking strategies to be in place, it was sometimes expected that all staff in a school would follow the same strategy: hence, if the SLT expected deep marking, that is what would be required regardless of Ofsted guidance.

Where teachers reported feeling a positive level of support for and acknowledgement of their efforts from SLT members, there appeared to be some link with perceptions of workload being relatively more manageable. Those teachers that felt ‘disconnected’ from the SLT appeared to be less positive about managing workload pressures. For further detail on this issue, see section 4.1.

## **2.1.2 Perceptions and Expectations of Workload**

Senior leaders commonly reported that the workload across their school workforce was high. Words they used included: ‘mammoth’, ‘relentless’ and ‘working to capacity’. Among secondary senior leaders there was a perception that workload – and the drivers of that workload – differed by department or faculty. For example:

- English and humanities (i.e. essay-based) subjects: the volume of work produced by learners is very high, so therefore this creates a large workload in terms of the time required to read and comment on the scripts submitted.
- Small departments with a low number of teaching staff (e.g. one or two) are unable to share workload such as planning or marking, so this can create particular challenges for these staff.
- Maths and science subjects: marking requirements can be continuous; learners want (and need) to have their work regularly marked/reviewed to show that they are developing a sound understanding of processes and calculations.
- Physical education: there can be match fixtures and other trips that take a lot of organising in terms of risk assessment, logistical planning and out-of-hours attendance.

Managing part-time staff was also reported to create additional workload for eight senior leaders (out of 21). Three respondents each mentioned:



- Timetabling complexities involved in accommodating the hours that part-time staff are available. One mentioned that software programmes for producing timetables do not work as easily when part-time or flexible working needs to be considered.
- Difficulties in managing communications if a staff member is not in school when senior leaders wish to speak with them; part-time staff can miss important meetings and feel that they are not included in discussions. Part-time teachers also flagged this as an issue.
- Additional workload for line managers in having to oversee increased numbers of staff and, carry out additional observations and performance management tasks.

Four of the part-time teachers interviewed were contracted to job share. They reported that workload drivers could vary depending on who their job share partner was, and senior leaders agreed that a lot of time could be taken up updating the job share partner on events that have taken place.

*'Because I am in a job share, I tend to spend half of my PPA time updating the other teacher on everything else that has happened over the last 2.5 days. We have a crossover day on a Wednesday when we are both in, and that helps – before we didn't have a crossover day....With a previous job share partner, we used to get together for a morning, say in the holidays to go through things. That really worked, we were at a similar stage in our own lives so could relate to each other, too. But with a different person that has been much more difficult. It is difficult to communicate with them. It really depends on the communication, because otherwise updating them can eat into your other time'. (Part-time primary school teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

Other impacts of part-time staff (noted by one senior leader each) were: constraints in school budgets and the cost of employing additional staff; poor behaviour in classes where cover/supply teachers are used on the days the permanent member of staff is not working – thereby leading to time being spent on disciplinary issues. However, senior leaders generally reported that introducing part-time opportunities had enabled their schools to retain talented teachers that may otherwise leave, for example following maternity leave or in the years leading up to full retirement. Some also felt that job-share arrangements provided children with different experiences in terms of teaching methods. However, this perspective was not shared by all. Four senior leaders from primary schools queried whether job-share arrangements affected children negatively due to the lack of continuity in the classroom.

Generally, senior leaders voiced a wish to either review school workload to identify where expectations could be reduced, or they had already done so (for strategies implemented, see section 3). Some senior leaders were very clear about the high level of marking and written feedback that teachers were expected to regularly provide to learners.

*'It is the expectation that books are marked and the marking policy is followed...It is not just ticks. Every member of staff annotates work with specific actions that students need to do following written assessment...We do work scrutiny to make sure practice is in place across the academy. If we find books are not marked for three weeks we are expected as leaders to challenge that member of staff. There is quite a large demand on staff....[they] typically work until 9pm'. (Assistant Principal of a secondary school)*

However, in another secondary school the SLT was encouraging teachers to ensure that they did not work late every night of the week:

*'On Friday, the children go at 3pm and everyone is encouraged to go home after the kids have gone. It makes a difference. In other schools [on a Friday], they are expected to work to 6pm'. (Assistant Headteacher of a secondary school)*

For further detail relating to school expectations of teachers in terms of maintaining records and/or other evidence for accountability, see section 2.3.

## **2.2 Patterns in Workload**

Both senior leaders and teachers reported that there were 'pinch points' for workload throughout the school year. These tended to be:

- The start of the school year.
- Christmas.
- The run-up to exam periods.
- End-of-year reporting.

Senior leaders emphasised that recruitment processes could be time-consuming and created a lot of additional workload, especially as these tended to occur during the summer term. Three teachers said that their SLT actively tried to spread out workload across the year to avoid any crunch points. However, such efforts were not always perceived to be effective due to the nature of the education timetable.

*'There are always cyclical pressures...reports, teaching and learning review, or you need to write a test for Year 8. The school tries to spread tasks across the calendar... but it's not really working'. (Full-time secondary school science teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

Teachers in secondary schools acknowledged that the workload in the summer term can lighten, as Years 11 – 13 are on exam leave and coursework has been completed, marked and submitted to exam boards. Nonetheless, although their time is freed up as a

result, interviewees reported that this can then be taken over by tasks such as providing lesson cover for other years. For primary teachers in particular the summer term was perceived to be especially busy due to end-of-year reporting and extra-curricular events.

## 2.3 Accountability

Interviewees were asked to describe the types of records that they are asked to keep by SLT as evidence for accountability. Common responses in terms of the types of record-keeping undertaken by teachers included:

- Internal data/pupil progress monitoring (e.g. data submitted to software/ databases to monitor pupil outcomes – such as homework scores, test results) – mentioned by 32 teachers.
- Maintaining records of activity – such as tasks set to learners, lessons plans, attendance at homework sessions – mentioned by 14 teachers.
- Staff performance management (e.g. use of software to record progress and evidence against personal targets regularly) – mentioned by 11 teachers.
- Providing evidence of differentiation, or the interventions put in place to support differentiation – mentioned by 8 teachers.
- Pastoral care (e.g. safeguarding, behavioural interventions, risk assessment administration) – mentioned by 5 teachers.

Teachers of all types reported that the records they kept were maintained as evidence for Ofsted, as internal records for tracking pupil progress, or as part of staff performance management processes.

*‘Accountability has become so important that the enjoyment of learning [for pupils] has gone out of the window [because the focus for teachers] is just endless marking, progress, accountability.’ (Part-time primary teacher with over 11 years’ experience)*

In addition, senior leaders were asked what types of records staff were being asked to keep and the expectations that they as senior leaders had of staff in terms of maintaining evidence. Their responses reflected those of teachers and commonly included continuous updates of data, reports of lesson observations and evidence of long-term lesson planning. However, some senior leaders were working towards reducing the types of evidence to be recorded. This was felt to bring with it challenges in terms of team-working and developing staff capabilities.

*‘I don’t need to look at [all] plans, I only need to see if stuff isn’t working – that’s the point I am aiming towards. It takes a lot of team building and trust to do that. At first, I had staff who were not competent, I had to go through a process which created an intense workload...[I] put in place a set of expectations for everyone*

*and held all to account...I don't really need to see planning as long as I can see progress'. (Headteacher of a primary school)*

Part-time teachers predominantly mentioned evidence of their own performance and pupil data tracking. Several mentioned duplicating data recording and the process was perceived by these respondents to be a 'tick box' exercise for schools:

*'There are specific forms that have to be completed, recording the activities and support taking place for each individual student. But those forms never seem to be looked at again (by SLT)...The forms are given to the Head of Faculty, but they come from the top. Not a great deal is done from it, there is no evaluation, I have never had anybody question me or follow up anything that I have written on one of those forms – like how did that intervention go, or how has that helped?' (Part-time secondary science teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

This is not to say that teachers did not recognise the importance of evidencing progress and maintaining accurate data – as one noted *'obviously we need to do quality control. But the balance has gone wrong'*. Thus, for several there was sense of frustration related to completing tasks that did not appear to directly inform teaching and learning, or improve outcomes for children. Instead, these teachers felt that information they submitted was either not used to inform decisions by SLT, or in some cases not read at all. This was perceived as a particular issue in staff performance management:

*'This year I had to develop a science portfolio for key stage 1. Nobody will look at it, nobody has seen it. It is done to tick a box for my performance. It is not doing anything to improve children's learning. It won't be productive in that sense. I think things like that could be changed, so everything you do inputs into the learning'. (Part-time primary teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

Software systems used for recording staff performance were felt by teachers to be complex and 'cumbersome', or the amount of evidence required to be kept – such as email records – very time-consuming to maintain.

*'[It involves] uploading evidence documents that are already stored elsewhere on other systems, for example lesson observations, registers and intervention sessions that you've run... and provide evidence for your performance management'. (Full-time secondary science teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

Although they understood the benefits of being able to track performance, these teachers felt that using new software introduced by the school, without sufficient training, meant that the process added negatively to their workload.

*'Uploading evidence for performance management, in some ways it is good, you should be able to log in, see progress at a glance, everything is*

*one place. But in reality, it creates a lot more work, particularly at the start of a new system when you are getting used to it. Training on these things is rushed, you are never given enough time to learn something.'* (Part-time secondary maths teacher with over 11 years' experience)

Others felt that levels of trust towards the teaching profession had reduced across the wider public and within the media, and that this had led to the necessity for higher volumes of record-keeping. Four teachers said that communications with parents was increasingly becoming a time-consuming aspect of workload.

*'I record when I've asked [learners] to do something, and if they've not done it, I record contact home. I record after school sessions I've put on for them and they haven't attended. I record everything because...I have to be able to justify why they didn't get the grades they were predicted...I don't think anything can be changed to make it easier, unless we start to trust the teacher again...Our judgements aren't trusted'.* (Full-time secondary food technology teacher with over 11 years' experience)

## 3. Strategies for Managing Workload

Interviewees were asked to identify the strategies that they used for themselves, or that their schools had implemented more widely to address workload. This section describes those strategies and the ways in which they have been adopted by teachers and senior leaders. The perceived impact of those strategies is summarised in the concluding comments to this chapter.

### 3.1 Individual Workload Management Strategies

Teachers and senior leaders were asked what approaches they take personally to managing their workload or work/life balance. Where they could identify specific strategies that they used, these were:

- Controlling working hours (33 interviewees).
- Administrative self-discipline (15 interviewees).
- Part-time working (12 interviewees).
- Using pre-existing resources (6 interviewees).

#### Control of working hours

Most teachers tended to report being at school early in the morning (e.g. 7.30am) and/or leaving premises late in the evening (e.g. 7pm), in order to manage their workload. The majority of senior leaders and full-time early career teachers noted this as a management strategy. They reported working late into the evenings at home, and also during the weekend. Several senior leaders said that they would arrive at school early in the morning when nobody else was there, so that they could complete work uninterrupted.

*'I am at my desk at 7am. I find that first hour and a half is magical, I get a lot done in terms of spreading workload. You have to be very focused'.*

(Assistant Headteacher in a secondary school)

## Managing working hours

Senior leaders and teachers alike were keen to emphasise that they had learned with experience that it was important not to work every weekend, or every evening. Their strategies to ensure this happened, included:

- Leaving computers and/or portable devices at school so that work cannot be continued at home in the evenings.
- Being strict about leaving school at 5pm or 6pm, and not taking work home.
- Arranging social events for weekday evenings so that they were unable to work.
- Cycling to and from work, which helped overall health and fitness, and also meant that books or computers could not be carried home for working in the evening.

Some teachers were adamant that they did not take work home at all, or that they would limit home working to specific evenings in the week and one day at the weekend. They noted that *'it doesn't always work out that way'* but were concerned about the need to rest and have a break in order to be effective teachers in the classroom during the daytime.

Senior leaders all reported working long hours to manage their workload, but they also described time-management strategies that they implemented during their working day to ensure that work was prioritised. This included closing their office doors for up to one hour per day or blocking out time to finalise documents for submission. Those that did not do this found that their work was often interrupted and became unmanageable.

*'I make sure I am available for staff a lot of the time. At certain times of the day I shut the door to not get interrupted...I can crack on and clear my desk. If you are available all the time, people want you all the time. Sometimes you have to set time for yourself, don't be afraid to do that'. (Headteacher in a primary school)*

Some teachers reported that over time they learned to be less demanding on themselves and at times lower their own standards as to the level of work they needed to produce on a daily or weekly basis. This was a point emphasised, too, by some senior leaders. Words used by senior leaders to describe the work of teachers included 'conscientious', 'dedication', 'committed', and 'perfectionist'. Some described how they had introduced new policies and procedures to reduce the volume of workload on marking and planning for instance, however, they sometimes found it difficult to get all teachers on board.

*'Some teachers are brilliant but perfectionists – but that is really time-consuming. You can still do a good job without being a perfectionist and*

*that is sustainable. I have seen some where it all has to be perfect for every lesson and every detail thought out and every last bit of book marked. Actually, you can't sustain that. You can say to people, this is enough. But they have to take it on board for themselves. I have seen talented conscientious young teachers come in, they are under pressure, they want to do well and get good exam results...they want everything to be perfect.... You need to get people to understand that is not the case. You showing up, being there, keeping going is really important'. (Assistant Headteacher in a secondary school)*

## **Administrative self-discipline**

Fifteen senior leaders said that they had specific administrative tasks that they tried to implement strictly each day. These were: managing emails quickly, forward planning and list-making.

### **Managing emails**

It was common for teachers and senior leaders to report receiving over one or two-hundred emails per day. Subsequently senior leaders suggested that it was important to become disciplined about how emails were dealt with. Strategies included:

- Ensuring wherever possible that emails are dealt with straight away, rather than having to go back again to them later.
- Clearing emails each day, so that a backlog does not build up.

Senior leaders emphasised that it was important to be mindful of other members of staff, particularly when sending work-related emails in the evening. This included:

- Adopting policies to not allow work emails to be sent after set times in the evening.
- Putting a delivery delay on emails – so even if they are drafted in the evening, they do not arrive in the recipient's inbox until the morning.

*'If I work at night, that doesn't mean I expect an immediate response in the evening. It does sometimes get to one-up-manship of who can send the latest emails'. (Assistant headteacher in a secondary school)*

In terms of tackling administrative duties other than emails, senior leaders commonly mentioned the need to ensure that long-term planning was undertaken to keep working practices efficient.



## Forward planning

One headteacher suggested creating an A3 grid for each term, with meetings, training and other events down the side and along the top the weeks of the term. The priorities on the School Development Plan are included and confirmed events added in. To plan, this headteacher then works back from the date of the event to the sorts of meetings required and the planning time that will be needed. For example, the date for end-of-year reports going to parents is plotted back to the date that teachers need to submit completed reports to the headteacher.

*'I do it at the start of each year and each term as I put more detail in...It is a very visual way of seeing where the workload is and joining the dots. For example, when you put sports day in, plan two weeks back to put a staff meeting in to talk about it'.* (Headteacher in a primary school)

Several senior leaders also mentioned making lists for each day, so that workload was ordered and prioritised.

*'I like a list. I have a diary that is a page-per-day, and I make a list for every day...I work through the list. It makes me feel in control'.* (Headteacher in a primary school)

It was also important to remain 'responsive', highlighted senior leaders, and thus the list of tasks needed to be viewed as a guide. Sometimes unexpected events happen and incidents that require immediate attention. This means that the list of tasks can change quite suddenly: it is a working document to help manage priorities.

## Part-time working

Part-time teachers all reported that they worked on their days 'off' during the week, and this was how they managed their own workload. Most reported working full-time hours (e.g. 40 hours per week), but being employed on a part-time contract.

*'On a Monday I am in school and am meant to finish at 12.30 but I stay until 3.30. On a Tuesday I stay until 6pm. That means I can manage to get through everything, but I also take some work home for the weekends – that's how I manage it'.* (Part-time secondary school teacher with over 11 years' experience)

The majority of part-time teachers had consciously made the decision to remain in a part-time role, or had reduced their hours to a part-time role in order to be able to manage their workload.

### **Managing challenges of working part-time**

Attendance at meetings can create difficulties in terms of coming into school on days that part-time staff are not timetabled to be there. Therefore, one school is trying to address this issue by running parent evenings on a four-week cycle:

*'... because there are so many staff who now work part-time, the rule of thumb has always been that if parents' evening fell on your day off, you didn't have to attend them but you had to make up the time by phoning the parents...Next year, parents' evenings are going to run on four-week cycles, with it being on a different night each week. So theoretically, within that four-week period, parents evening should fall on at least one of your normal days in school.'* (Part-time secondary school teacher with over 11 years' experience)

### **Adopting new approaches to marking**

Ten teaching staff (including early career and those more experienced) said that they had adopted their own marking strategies (information on whole-school approaches to marking is included in section 3.2). These strategies were either peer/live marking or the introduction of marking codes. Peer, or live, marking commonly involves learners marking each other's books during lesson time with the teacher working with them through common areas of feedback.

#### **Using marking codes**

The adoption of marking codes includes the use of code sheets, stickers, and stamps to designate common points of feedback that can be distributed to all learners. Pieces of work are highlighted with an appropriate sticker/code. The definitions of the codes are then distributed to all learners and they can check which ones refer to their work.

Teachers reported that this can reduce a lot of duplication in workbooks, particularly where similar comments are being noted regularly across learners' work. It is a method adopted by both primary and secondary school teachers, but they emphasised the importance of ensuring learners clearly understand how the system works.

*'At the start of the year there is a copy of the codes on the wall and I go through them with the children to make sure they understand how marking will be done, and there is a copy in their book.'* (Full-time early career primary teacher)

A small number of other ideas to help marking workload were offered. These were all suggested by participants as helping to reduce the frequency of workload ‘pinch’ points throughout the year.

- Planning class assessments so that they are spread throughout the term, and therefore all marking does not fall at once.
- Using resources such as marking calendars to help to predict workload levels at certain points of the year.
- Creating marking grids at the same time as lesson planning, with tick boxes on the grid for quick assessment against specific criteria that a unit or module is covering.

### **Use of pre-existing resources**

As well as collaborating with colleagues at school (see section 3.2), individual teachers said that they tried to draw on resources that have already been developed by others and made publicly available. They found these resources online (e.g. via the Times Educational Supplement (TES) website). Some teachers reported that they had paid for these resources themselves where school funding had not been available. Teachers with several years’ experience also spoke of re-using resources and lesson plans from previous years as guidance, and adapting them where necessary.

## **3.2 School-Based Approaches to Workload Management**

When asked about workload management strategies that had been implemented across whole schools, or within Departments (rather than just by individual teachers) the following were most commonly cited:

- Reduction in reporting requirements (23 interviewees).
- Encouraging collaboration (22 interviewees).
- New marking strategies (14 interviewees).
- Use of specific software packages (8 interviewees).
- Increased focus on staff wellbeing (7 interviewees).
- Developing homework strategies (4 interviewees).
- Limiting working hours (4 interviewees).
- Additional administrative and/or specialist staff (3 interviewees).

These approaches are detailed below with exemplars of practice throughout. Feedback from senior leaders was varied, but all said they had taken steps to reduce workload across their school. Some had invested significant time in reviewing and changing policies and approaches and had brought workload to the forefront of cognisance by integrating it into the school development plan. Reflecting on practice was also

encouraged through performance management so that staff could assess the effectiveness of their work and reduce that which did not have an impact.

*'I have put it in the school's development plan – it is a living document – to reduce workload is in there and so every time we come up with something, it makes you ask the question, why are we doing it, what is it adding? So, we are not doing it just in case.....[workload] is a high priority in the school development plan...they have to talk about it and share in faculty meetings what they have done to reduce workload and we share that between faculties.'* (Headteacher in a secondary academy)

### **Reduction in reporting requirements**

There was evidence commonly offered during the interviews that steps were being taken across schools to reduce the level of record-keeping required.

## **Actions to reduce data reporting requirements**

Fourteen teachers were able to identify specific changes being made in their schools that were effectively reducing their reporting and data entry requirements. Many of these were also mentioned by senior leaders, where strategic decisions had been made to reduce reporting requirements.

- Reducing the number of data tracking points (e.g. from six to three: termly rather than half-termly) or spreading them across the year.

*'With data drops, we worked with the calendar to manage and split them up a bit. We were collecting them for every year group at the same time. Now we have split years 11 and 13 and have them at a certain time and others at other times to spread it a little bit. We did consider spreading them further but that meant staff would be doing data drops every week for the year, staff didn't want to do it every week, they said they would rather do it together and get it out of the way.'* (Headteacher in a secondary academy).

- Data being tracked from timetabled tests – i.e. no additional testing instigated for the purpose of gathering data.
- Data collated on a central basis (e.g. Departmentally) with it communicated clearly to staff by SLT how this is then used to inform teaching or marking strategies.
- Preparing for and discussing with Ofsted, specific groups of learners, e.g. progress and support for SEND learners.
- Maintenance of evidence focused on data entry rather than written reports; not requiring teachers to log paperwork, lesson plans, emails etc. as evidence of practice or work completed.
- Collaborative working for data entry – e.g. a member of staff each takes the lead for a subject or group of learners and they are responsible for logging data for that cohort only.
- No duplication of records solely for staff performance management – the same data/evidence used for this as for pupil progress tracking.
- Administrative staff inputting assessment data to school systems, instead of teachers.

Schools had also changed requirements in terms of the written reports sent to parents. For example, in one secondary academy, written reports are no longer required – parents are provided with a grade for each subject, along with numbered ratings for engagement, homework, independent learning and behaviour. An early career science teacher in the

school stated that the change has *'reduced my hours by about 35 hours [from the time taken to write student reports]...it was an extremely good idea. Parent evenings are a much better time to give feedback, you get to say a lot more and you can get it across better'*. Several senior leaders mentioned making the decision to reduce the length of end of year reports e.g. from six or eight pages to two sides of A4.

Nine senior leaders highlighted that they had reviewed their school's lesson planning strategy in an attempt to reduce reporting requirements. One headteacher suggested that – like daily list-making – lesson planning can be regarded as a reflective exercise by *'planning learning intentions and how resources are used'*, rather than creating (or requesting from teachers) an inflexible document that rigidly designated activities to each lesson. It was felt that this helped to reduce the amount of recording and preparation required from staff beforehand, and also encouraged teachers to adapt to children's needs during lessons.

### **Encouraging collaboration**

Collaboration among teaching staff was reported to be used primarily for:

- Developing schemes of work (e.g. all contributing to a central plan for lessons).
- Sharing the design of teaching resources with colleagues, uploading them to a central school portal for all teachers to access.
- Sharing marking and assessment responsibilities.

Teachers tended to report that collaboration occurred within Departments and/or across year groups, rather than whole schools. Collaboration was a more common feature of interviews with secondary school staff compared with those in primary schools, perhaps due to the size of schools and the rapid developmental differences between year groups in primary schools meaning that each can require quite specific approaches to teaching. Collaborative working appeared to be particularly common for staff in secondary science departments, where they shared assessment and data tracking duties. Those collaborating in humanities subjects tended to mention sharing the creation of learning and teaching resources. Some primary school teachers also noted collaboration in long-term planning and the creation of resources.

Nonetheless, attitudes towards collaboration could differ and interviewees felt that some teachers were more prepared to share with their colleagues than others. Subsequently it was emphasised that staff buy-in to the idea of collaboration was key to its effectiveness – clear engagement across the team collaborating was necessary to make the process work well. There was also a word of caution that lesson plans and schemes of work still require some tailoring.

*'You know your own class and for someone else to plan for your class...doesn't always work...You have to go back and edit. If everyone*

*used the same schemes of work it can get generic and boring for the students'. (Full-time early career English teacher in a secondary school)*

Seven senior leaders noted the importance of allowing staff the time to collaborate, particularly in departments where they were able to create and share resources together effectively; ensuring they had Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time together and that it was blocked in suitable time slots (rather than split across the week).

*'Sharing planning is a great idea, but there is a bit of an accountability or responsibility problem. Who does it or finishes it, and are people free to do it...When you have to replace [resources and plans] every year due to curriculum change, it is harder'. (Headteacher in a secondary school)*

A few senior leaders had noted how some Departments had bought in Schemes of Work to share and reduce workload. Collaboration was not, however, solely focused on shared planning and the creation of teaching resources. There was also a varied range of approaches to sharing information and ideas.

One headteacher in a primary school had set up a Pastoral Team specifically to support them with the workload related to multi-agency meetings, safeguarding and support for vulnerable children and families.

*'It is unmanageable for one person to manage all cases, so we set up a Pastoral Team – the SENCO and learning support mentor were pulled together with me. Each is a key worker and attends meetings. Then we would meet together to share what is happening, so if I was at a meeting off-site and a family comes in, in crisis, then any one of the team members could pick up that family. It made it more manageable, it helps with problem solving...We have enlarged that team with a TA who specifically leads on working with looked after children...The high workload is managed'. (Headteacher in a primary school)*

All senior leaders reported reviewing staff meetings in terms of their content, timing and the need for them. Some senior leaders felt that meetings were necessary for keeping on top of new initiatives, and communicating information to staff. Others were looking at changing 'traditional' meeting formats.

It was however emphasised by senior leaders that learning about strategies that were implemented successfully in neighbouring institutions does not mean that those ideas will necessarily work as effectively in another school. They stated that the effectiveness of any one strategy will depend on a range of influences including school culture, the attitude towards change among teaching staff, and the needs and wishes of those staff in terms of working relationships, levels of trust and autonomy and staff buy-in to the strategic vision of the school.

## Staff meetings

Considerations being made were:

- Changing the frequency of staff meetings or limiting them to one per week. For example, timetabling the meetings so that there is space available in the day if they are required, but if there was little new information to impart, these can be cancelled or postponed to free up teachers for other tasks.
- Consulting with staff members about the purpose of staff meetings to ensure that their views were considered. Senior leaders said that some teachers appreciate being able to meet and build working relationships face-to-face, and this was an important factor in deciding on the intrinsic value of meetings. The benefit of regular face-to-face interaction was noted as being especially significant for effective SLTs that need to generate trust between each other and understand the ways in which each other worked.
- Scheduling meetings for first thing in the morning to ensure that they did not run on too long and remained focused – i.e. the work day has to start by 9 am so meetings cannot go beyond this.
- Having daily fast five-minute 'standing' meetings, where staff gather quickly for updates or important notices, creating a constant flow of information and reserving lengthier meetings for strategic discussion.
- Ensuring that meetings were not just used for disseminating information, using them for professional development so they are 'INSET driven', sharing learning or completing tasks.
- Allowing some meeting time to be given over to staff to 'catch-up' e.g. once per half term or cancelling meetings at busy times (e.g. around assessment).

## New marking strategies

Fourteen teachers and nine school leaders reported that their schools had adopted new marking strategies, specifically aimed at reducing the time spent by teachers on marking books. This included:

- Live or peer marking during lessons.
- Whole-class feedback or the use of marking codes.
- Reducing the number of data and assessment points in the school year.
- Task-marking, with specific tasks marked every six lessons rather than in-depth marking of workbooks. The task may include some written work to solve a problem, a quiz question to test knowledge and a practice exam question marked against criteria. This can be completed on one worksheet and then glued into workbooks after marking.



## School marking policies

Policies adopted in some schools have included:

- No more than four words on any mark (except assessment): these words are linked to feedback sheets, which match codes to marking criteria and common comments.

*'Write a number, have targets that match the numbers, and success criteria related to the marking codes. For every one-minute marking, students should spend ten minutes responding. So, if you have five common marking codes, that's fifty minutes – you have a feedback lesson in that'.* (Full-time early career English teacher in a secondary school)

- Marking booklets produced by the school to cover each term's topics. Children not writing in books but completing tasks against learning objectives in the marking booklets at specific points. The booklets help to easily identify the areas or topics where pupils may need additional support.
- Adopting verbal feedback strategies, particularly in primary schools. Learners receive praise if they have done well or additional support to push them to the next level. Primary school teachers have found that this approach is more immediate for young learners who do not always respond as well to written feedback, and can boost their confidence.
- Removing triple impact marking and using data outcomes to track progress instead.

One senior leader described a full review process across a faculty (maths, which was particularly struggling with their 'markload') as a pilot before wider roll-out. This involved:

- Plotting marking workload of different types of staff (teachers, Newly Qualified Teachers - NQTs - and those with responsibility) to see where marking was concentrated and smooth out 'pinch points'.
- Reviewing how learners used the feedback, as a result book marking was removed (as this was felt appropriate for maths, but it was noted that it is different for different faculties).
- Reviewing homework marking and introducing more self and peer assessment with teachers recording the results to inform progress records.
- Use of a new assessment system to highlight skills on a pre-printed sheet which learners use to mark what they are confident in and what they need to do to progress. This is then addressed in lesson time where they can work on what they have identified.

*'We have found that this has reduced marking burden and increased the rate of progress. Based on that research and the work we have done, it has had an impact – it is now an outstanding faculty and they were going under and I couldn't afford to lose any maths teachers – I had to act fast. I picked to do action research.'* (Headteacher in a secondary academy).

The implementation of new marking policies itself was reported to create a heavy additional workload and was regarded as a risk among some senior leaders. For example, senior leaders noted that staff attitudes could create a barrier to change – some teachers wanted to plan and mark in detail because that was how they worked most effectively and felt most confident. Others noted how it was difficult to bring all teachers on board with the new policies, particularly where a school had been deemed as 'requires improvement'. In these circumstances, schools had been required to provide more evidence and as a result marking and planning had become onerous. Teachers were reluctant however, to move to a streamlined approach in fear of a poor inspection outcome. Senior leaders in schools which had made changes to their marking policy stressed how they were less mindful of 'the requirements of Ofsted' and felt that their new approach had worked.

*'We stopped doing triple marking and detailed planning. Ofsted did publish a paper to say that they don't want to see all the detail, marking for marking's sake in three different coloured pens is not helpful. We do have colours in our marking policy but we only do this when relevant. Our motto is less but better. We are trying not to do it just in case we get an Ofsted. They came at the end of February or early March and we did fine. They did raise things. We said what the school's marking policy is, but they were seeing inconsistencies in application of it across so it was ok, they want to see children make progress, and for us to be able to tell them how we know.'* (Headteacher in a secondary academy).

A few other senior leaders, however, were not convinced that Ofsted would not be looking for examples of detailed marking and planning during inspection.

### **Use of software packages**

Eight senior leaders and several teachers were bringing in the use of software such as Apps or other tools to help share information and documentation more efficiently with staff and learners, and to reduce duplication of effort.

These included: Seesaw, One Note, Show My Homework, Evidence for Learning App, O Track, GO 4 Schools, Socrative, Lexia, Class Charts, Standard Tracker, Educake, Google Classroom, Google Docs, Google Forum, and Tapestry.

*'Children used to have a learning journal and a teacher would stick in post-it notes on how children were working, and the evidence collected and*

*assessed. Now [the teacher] can take a picture on [a tablet] and type a comment, click on the assessment level and criteria and the whole lot is collated and messages go straight to parents...[Parents] can like it or comment on it. It is brilliant, but getting to the point where you can set it up is tricky'. (Headteacher in a primary school)*

The use of technology was particularly valued by one special school which had replaced paper-based learning journals by use of an App where teachers could take photographs of work, annotate them and link the work to targets. They found the software very flexible as it can fit the special school curriculum well.

One common concern flagged with the increased use of technology in schools, and particularly for providing feedback to students, was varying levels of internet/computer accessibility outside of school. Teachers noted that some learners do not have access to computers or the internet on a regular basis, and this can create problems for electronic homework and feedback systems.

Furthermore, senior leaders raised issues in terms of having high-speed broadband installed in the schools (and the cost of broadband services), or finding the time and the skilled staff who are able to install and set up software packages.

*'Schools are charged for broadband as a business would. The cost is exorbitant...When we first put in [the software] we had no high-speed broadband and teachers would have to take [devices] home and upload at home in the evenings...That was the kind of obstacle we came across. It is time, you need to keep updating to keep efficient...Technology could be a labour saver only if you invest enough to roll it out...To have efficiency, you need investment and training'. (Headteacher in a primary school)*

Adequate staff training was reported to be fundamental. This will ensure that the SLT and teaching staff were clear about the functionality available via software (particularly in terms of data analysis), thereby reducing unnecessary time and effort being made manually where existing technology could perform a task.

## **Use of specialist software in schools**

New technology and software was being adopted across schools in a range of ways. Senior leaders gave simple solutions for sharing information quickly and removing duplication by:

- Making meeting notes on a tablet rather than having handwritten paper; not printing out meeting papers but having them available electronically on a portable device.
- Using project management or note-taking software as a 'form of electronic filing cabinet'. Other members of staff are then encouraged to use the same software so that documents and notes can be linked and shared simultaneously. Some teachers were using project management software to plan lessons and run class programmes, providing a space for learners to upload their work and for teachers to mark it.
- Sharing email-based calendars across staff so that all can view them and appointments can be dropped into one place. Senior leaders also appreciated that this electronic calendar can also be accessed when off-site and any updates will sync across all staff.
- Using online assessment tools to generate results of pupil progress and automatic analysis of data and reports to identify areas of weakness and pupils that would benefit from interventions.
- Reviewing and marking homework assignments through online systems. These were enabling learners to upload their work, teachers would mark it directly (with standard comments available for copy and pasting) and learners accessed their marked work and were able to address comments immediately in the same document. Parents also have access to the system to review progress.
- Tracking and analysing pupil data in one central school database, rather than having several different systems for recording progress.
- Setting homework tasks via online tools, which will also automatically mark pupil answers, e.g. in mathematics.
- Recording progress or feedback, e.g. drama or music recitals as evidence of practical work, and uploading these to school systems, rather than asking learners to create large portfolios of written work to evidence the practical. Using software to record verbal feedback.

## **Increased focus on staff wellbeing**

A range of schools were noted in the interviews for having introduced specific working groups or support systems that focused specifically on staff wellbeing and mental health. This included activities such as:

- Workshops and classes, e.g. healthy eating, mindfulness, relaxation, yoga, Zumba.
- Group meetings for staff to share concerns for example if they had a bad lesson.
- Work-life balance weeks once per term where there were no afterschool clubs so that teachers could leave at a reasonable time.
- Trips to local cultural centres such as galleries and museums.
- Buying in counselling or confidential helplines.

Six senior leaders mentioned setting up wellbeing working parties, surveys or focus groups and workload groups within their schools. These would typically include Heads of Department, some members of the SLT and teaching workforce.

*'We have reduced assessment points...we don't mark everything...This has cut down quite a bit of workload and to get it agreed we created a working party... We did lots of research and got information from other schools, students, staff and parents. We ran a survey through SurveyMonkey – the results were analysed and presented to the SLT. We also designed a new assessment calendar showing how we could assess the students, and it was accepted'. (Full-time early career geography teacher in a secondary school)*

Others understood that large initiatives were not always required (or possible within their budgets), but they had learned that regular acknowledgement and appreciation of staff was invaluable to boosting morale and positive attitudes towards workload issues. Teachers concurred that having their work and effort acknowledged made the workload itself easier to cope with psychologically.

*'We spend a lot of time and effort trying to make people feel appreciated. We worked out that little things like saying thank you and acknowledgement that some behaviour is really challenging, acknowledging to the class team if they have had a [bad] day. Saying thank you or well done – appreciating people goes a long way'. (Headteacher in a secondary school)*

*'One group we are concerned about is those coming back after maternity leave and those who have been off for other reasons. Or we might know a family member is ill. We are looking at having time, talking with them about how they are getting on and then following up after two months – making sure that we are looking after them'. (Headteacher in a secondary school)*

## Promoting health and wellbeing

One secondary school geography teacher appreciated the welfare and wellbeing plan that their school had in place. The school ran its own workload survey and staff wellbeing days included:

- Sport and fitness classes.
- Cookery workshops on making healthy meals.
- Days focused on mindfulness and reducing stress or anxiety.
- Ensuring that teachers returning to work following illness, or with care responsibilities outside of school, were consulted regularly to check that they have the support they needed.

These wellbeing days were scheduled to take place on training days so that students were not in school at the same time. In other schools, these events were run as ‘twilight’ sessions in the evenings, with yoga and relaxation classes.

One school had assigned a working group that met half-termly to discuss wellbeing. This had been running for five years and was assigned a £5,000 budget per year to put on events that promoted wellbeing across the school: *‘It started as wellbeing for children but we realised quickly that their wellbeing is better if staff have wellbeing’*.

The effectiveness of workload working groups appears to have been mixed: where they did not work, teachers felt that there had been no change implemented in schools despite the discussions that took place. This left them feeling frustrated that there had been additional meetings and therefore a higher workload, specifically in order to discuss workload, but ultimately no long-term difference made to workload levels. Therefore, senior leaders suggested that, across schools, staff wellbeing needed to be:

- Seriously advocated for during SLT meetings, and that this can be encouraged by assigning a member of staff with responsibility for monitoring and communicating wellbeing issues.
- Considered across all types of school staff, and not just teachers.
- Covered during return-to-work and exit interviews in a concerted and focused way.

## Homework strategies

A few schools had implemented new strategies related to the design and completion of homework tasks. For example:

- Central bank of resources to which all staff contribute.

- Use of specific homework tools/software to complete tasks, mark and assess strengths and weaknesses.
- Strategic review of homework policy.

*'I made a directive to change homework policy.....pieces of work were getting set like a traditional homework timetable, but parents were complaining that it wasn't getting set or work not getting marked. I said to the teachers, based on research this type of homework is not effective so we are not doing that anymore. So, I said that we were going to analyse all homework setting and any that doesn't cause children to make progress we are not doing anymore, so all the types like a word search, design a poster – that they were doing just because we said we will set an hour of homework, were gone. Then I asked them to look at what was left, which was good and relook to see if there was enough progress from it and if they needed to add another good piece of quality homework or not. We are doing one-third of what we were doing before. It also had to be designed so it can be peer and self-assessed. One-third is for teacher feedback which is properly marked. One-third of it was to be flip learning, where they have tasks to prepare for next lesson. This reduced two-thirds of the marking on homework. I have given that directive this term. It has been a big plan to do that, to get into a position to get homework planned is a massive burden – but it is the pain to get the gain.'* (Headteacher in a secondary academy).

### **Communicating change to parents**

One senior leader was cutting down homework requirements. Consequently, they had identified a need to demonstrate to parents that children would still make satisfactory progress under the new system.

*'I will need to say that teachers are not as tired, they can focus on planning lessons'*  
(Headteacher in a secondary school)

If this communication with parents was not handled effectively, this headteacher felt that parents would complain and therefore add to the workload in terms of dealing with parental complaints. To mitigate the risks they felt it important to manage expectations:

- An individual plan for each Faculty had been developed.
- These plans would be published on the school website in advance of the implementation of the new homework strategy.
- This plan would detail the new system and its intended benefits.

## Limiting working hours

Four schools were reported to have put curfews in place, so that there were set hours during which teachers are permitted to be in work (such as not before 7.30am, or not staying after 6pm.). This approach was also felt to help streamline staff meetings – for example, meetings were made shorter to ensure teaching staff ‘still have an hour of marking before 5.30pm’, or they are shorter because the school is closing.

In schools that had previously had these limitations in place but since changed, teachers noticed the difference that it made to their working hours.

*‘It used to be better when the school closed at 5pm every day. Now there are a lot of lettings – groups that come in, rent the space and use the facilities. That means that the school is open until at least 8pm every night. So the staff end up staying in too.’* (Part-time primary school teacher with over

## Additional administrative and/or other specialist staff

An English teacher in a secondary school reported that their school was assigning a member of administrative staff to each department, to assist with teacher workload. The role of Higher Level Teaching Assistants (HLTAs) was appreciated where they were available to teaching staff, in sharing out the administrative tasks such as creating classroom displays. One senior leader stressed that empowering HLTAs could be beneficial to both them and other staff.

A primary school teacher mentioned that their school had employed specialist staff to deliver physical education and music lessons, which helped to free up PPA time for teaching staff.

However financial constraints made this difficult for teachers in many schools.

*‘The rule should be that if it is a job that administrative staff or teaching assistants do, then they are the roles that should be doing it. This has all gone out of the window. Teachers now set up experiments, we do the filing, we do all of it. We used to have technicians to help set up, and we had a school bank of HLTAs that we could book to support specific lessons. All of that has gone.’* (Part-time secondary school teacher with over 11 years’ experience)

## 3.3 Perceived Impact of Workload Management Strategies

Many of the strategies outlined in this section have been implemented by individual teachers, and across schools, to directly tackle instances of duplication of work, or to manage/share high volumes of tasks that need to be completed for individual learners.



Personal strategies to limit working hours were common among teaching staff and senior leaders, with forward planning and list-making noted as being clear ways through they felt more able to manage their priorities, visual any potential workload 'pinch' points and develop their organisational skills. In turn, this was felt by interviewees to reduce pressure levels by enabling the opportunity for workload to be planned and spread more evenly in advance.

Where classroom-based strategies had been put in place, such as new marking policies, reduction in report writing, and using specialist software, interviewees of all types reported that these had reduced the number of hours spent on each task. For example, data entry and maintaining evidence records were streamlined rather than duplicated. Although they were not asked to formally measure or quantify their perceived reduction in hours as a result of these strategies, as noted one teacher mentioned report writing being reduced by 35 hours due to changes that had been made in report style (e.g. rating learner performance and attitudes against set criteria, rather than providing longform text).

Broader workforce and team management strategies that focused on sharing resources/collaboration, acknowledging the efforts of staff and promoting wellbeing across the school workforce, were viewed by interviewees as being beneficial in reducing stress and anxiety levels. They were also perceived to support the development of positive relationships among staff members – including between SLTs and the wider workforce. Effective management of staff meetings, including 5-minute 'standing' meetings in the morning, was aimed to promote clear and consistent communications across the workforce, thereby reducing the hours spent by senior leaders in ensuring that all staff were up-to-date (particularly an issue for part-time staff) and only retaining lengthier meetings for more strategic discussion where necessary.

School-based approaches – reducing data tracking points, adopting new homework strategies, amending accountability processes – were noted by senior leaders to also reduce teaching workload in the long-term (for example, one headteacher who had changed their homework strategy perceived a reduction in 'markload' by two-thirds).

Implementing new school-wide strategies was regarded as time-consuming, particularly by senior leaders, and the impact of this work itself was reported to increase workload in the short-term. However, where the decision had been made by individual teachers, Heads of Department or senior leaders to review existing practice and instigate change, they noted the positive effect in terms of workload, and in attitudes towards behaviour, teaching and learning.

*'We are not doing all the classwork in books anymore, which means that not everything in books has to be marked. We have bought mini whiteboards and pens and the kids use these in class. Then we have bought a revision guide for each of them that contains all the revision notes*

*for the year that they will need. The whiteboards are attractive to the kids...There has been a noticeable increase in positive participation in class, especially among the lower level kids. Behaviour has improved...[therefore] disciplinary paperwork and evidencing has reduced too because of this'. (Part-time secondary school science teacher with over 11 years' experience)*

## 4. Support for Managing Workload

This section discusses the levels of support that teachers reported receiving in terms of acknowledging and tackling their workload. It also examines the support available to early career teachers and senior leaders specifically.

### 4.1 Levels of SLT Support

The influence of SLT attitudes towards workload reduction was a significant factor for many teachers taking part in the qualitative interviews.

*'[The headteacher] sets an example as she leaves when we leave and if it has been a bad day, she will say there is not a meeting tonight, get off early. She doesn't waste our time as she knows it is precious'. (Full-time early career primary school teacher)*

Forty-four teachers provided a direct view of how much they felt supported by members of their SLT.

- 19 teachers reported that they felt very supported and that they could approach the SLT; this included perceiving that their SLT acknowledged workload issues and directly attempted to address them by protecting PPA time and introducing new strategies; these teachers appreciated opportunities provided by the SLT to talk to others and share ideas or experiences.
- 14 teachers reported feeling ambivalent towards the level of support they received; they felt neither supported nor unsupported; they stated that the SLT were sympathetic about the level of workload experienced, but did not implement specific strategies to directly tackle the issues raised. These teachers were either unsure or did not think that they would directly approach their SLT about workload concerns, because they knew that their SLT was constrained due to budget limitations or a lack of other resources such as administrative staff or teaching assistants. Others acknowledged that although members of the SLT were 'sympathetic' to the pressures of teacher workload, they also expected the work to be done.
- 11 teachers said that pressure received from SLT was high and that there was a lack of understanding of the challenges they faced; they did not feel supported by SLT and said that they would not approach them for support.

## **Clear communications and acknowledgement**

*'School leaders have to be brave. We have to know when something needs doing to improve the school and students' progress and when to say no, that just creates more work and is not necessary'. (Headteacher of a secondary school)*

Senior leaders noted that it was important for SLT members to communicate clear messages to wider teaching staff, to ensure that the school workforce feels valued and is aware that the SLT are aware of, and considering, how to care for staff wellbeing.

Likewise, simple strategies that had been implemented by the SLT were appreciated by teaching staff.

*'The head might put a letter in your pigeon hole to say thank you for some specific work. It shows they understand and respect you'. (Full-time early career English teacher in a secondary school)*

One headteacher in a secondary school reported that if they ask for a piece of work, they always try to explain to staff members why it is needed, how it will inform other work in the school, and always try to provide 'enough lead-in' time for it to be completed. Teaching staff agreed that they find the workload easier to manage when they are aware of the reasons for additional tasks that they are being asked to carry out, or when they receive a clear message from SLT about the purpose of a piece of work (e.g. to inform policy or strategy, rather than record-keeping that was perceived to be 'for the sake of it').

Teachers noted that they appreciated feeling trusted by the SLT to manage their own time effectively.

*'On INSET days, [the headteacher] will not programme the whole day, he will say that we are the best people to work out for ourselves what needs doing...He leads from the front in that respect – he lets you decide how to use your time'. (Full-time early career primary teacher)*

The attitude of the SLT towards their own workload could also create a negative impact on the way teachers felt that they were perceived.

*'Last year was very difficult...The Head of Department in particular had unrelentingly high standards and had no understanding of having a work/life balance of their own. As a result, they expected similar levels of work from others. In the end I refused, I was simply unable to sustain seventy-hour weeks'. (Full-time early career English teacher in a secondary school)*

## 4.2 Support for Early Career Teachers

Early career teachers were asked whether their Initial Teacher Training (ITT) had included any preparation for managing workload. The training routes varied and included PGCE and Teach First. The majority said that there was not any specific coverage of workload management during their training. Two (of 28) noted seminars about work/life balance, or training sessions focused on marking and prioritising (it is not known the type of training route they took). There was a general perception that ITT did not provide a realistic impression of day-to-day teaching.

*'It would have been helpful [to have workload preparation within ITT] as we go into our first year and it is nothing like your training, so it is just a bit of a shock. When in placement, you don't really see what goes on behind the scenes, such as the meetings and meeting with parents. So, if there was more involvement with everyday teaching that might help'. (Full-time early career primary teacher)*

When asked what they would have liked to have had included in ITT, interviewees suggested:

- Time management strategies.
- Identifying and managing priorities.
- Good practice examples shared from teachers at different schools to those attended for placement.

During their first years of teaching, some early career teachers had received specific types of support from their schools:

- Six mentioned having a reduced timetable in the first year, with protected PPA and NQT time ranging from half to full days.
- Twelve reported having mentoring during their NQT year, for example from the Head of Department.

Most of those with a mentor had appreciated the regular contact with another member of staff, although some recognised that their mentors were also very busy or that the mentor could not address levels of workload. However, where this relationship worked well, there were clear benefits to new entrants into the profession. This included learning how to:

- Plan, particularly mid-term.
- Adapt resources.
- Locate pre-existing resources effectively.
- Learn from mistakes and develop reflective practice.

Where they had found the mentoring effective, three early career teachers had since been mentors themselves and a fourth school had developed new resources to support incoming NQTs.

Early career teachers were asked to consider whether there had been any changes in the way that they managed or perceived their workload since they began teaching. Overall, these participants reported that their workload levels had not changed, except in instances where they had taken on additional responsibilities, such as promotion to Head of Department. Instead they believed that their ability to prioritise tasks or draw on previous planning/delivery had improved.

*'By having more experience you manage your priorities better – like [knowing that] maths and English books are the most important for scrutiny by SLT and the school policy, so those are always up-to-date'.* (Full-time early career primary teacher)

Two early career teachers (one secondary and one primary) both highlighted that 'staying with the same year group' or key stage in the early years of teaching helps individuals to build confidence, knowledge and resources.

Some of the newer recruits into teaching reported feeling 'judged' by peers with more experience, for example if their priorities or approaches to workload differed. Furthermore, some talked about reducing their own expectations of themselves, for example by learning not to pressurise themselves into delivering 'perfect' lessons, or to 'draw a line' on the amount of self-assessment or self-reflection that they did. However, there was a sense among early career teachers that this negatively affected their professional development.

*'I realised I had to [reduce reflection of practice] to get everything done. I probably would have left teaching if I didn't. I am still an acceptable teacher, but I know I could be better if I had the time'.* (Full-time early career science teacher in a secondary school)

Nonetheless, it was perceived that 'time' and 'experience' were key in helping them to learn how to manage their workload (and their own expectations of it) in the early years of being a teacher.

One headteacher had noted that early career teachers were 'consistently' leaving the profession in the second or third year following NQT, due to the shock of the change in workload between their Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year and a full-time teaching timetable. To help with this, one headteacher was looking at the affordability of their school retaining second year teachers on the equivalent of an NQT timetable (rather than full-teaching commitments), in recognition that these recruits were still learning.

An early career teacher also suggested that expectations needed to be lower among SLTs, particularly in terms of additional responsibilities and extra-curricular participation

such as playground duty and afterschool clubs. They felt that this would enable new teachers to focus more time on preparation and development.

### 4.3 Support for Senior Leaders

Senior leaders were asked whether they had access to support to help them with managing their workload. They tended to mention a range of networks and groups that they attended, and these are listed below.

- **Headteacher and leadership networks** (8 interviewees): this included being part of a 'cluster', local partnership or collaboration of schools (rather than an Academy Trust) and included Teaching School Alliances. These networks were used for peer support, accessing contacts for more formal peer review arrangements as well as informal support and sharing experiences.
- **Multi-Academy Trusts** (3 interviewees): having access to experienced individuals who could visit the school, identify areas that are working well, but also help to pinpoint issues to focus on for improvement; being able to visit other schools to observe practice in different settings.
- **Membership of unions** (2 interviewees): availability of advice and guidance.
- **Social media** (1 interviewee): reading blogs, social media feeds focused on teacher workload, offering advice or ideas of how to manage workload.

Senior leaders commonly pointed out that network meetings in themselves did not reduce workload – indeed attending them, organising visits or conducting peer reviews could ultimately increase workload. However, the support these networks and meetings provided, and the ability to draw on the experiences of others, were valued by senior leaders. Some mentioned identifying the benefits of different strategies, the impact or reasons for carrying out a particular piece of work.

*'Making the partnerships work requires work...you can see how with really good very loose partnership working with some strong shared accountability you could stop doing things within individual schools and replace them with partnership working that would create some savings to total workload. But ...you have to be really confident in the strength and direction of the partnership because you are making changes that would affect your school's culture'. (Headteacher of a secondary school)*

Whilst the networks were highly valued, senior leaders, particularly those in more informal settings, did not feel that their own or their teachers' workload was significantly addressed within the network meetings. One headteacher, however, reported working in partnership around assessment without levels, which they hoped in the long-term would create a strategic response across headteachers that would reduce individual workload by not requiring each headteacher duplicating effort to create a new system.

Four senior leaders said that they did not attend network meetings to find support with workload issues, because they felt that once they reached the level of leadership *'you are expected to be able to manage [workload]'* or that there was an acceptance among school leaders that the heavy workload was part of the role. Indeed, this perception was echoed, too, among senior leaders who did attend network meetings. As much as they said that they mentioned the level of their workload to each other during these meetings, they reported that there was little directly implemented through these networks to find ways to reduce workload – it was perceived to be part of the role that would not change.

## 4.4 Response to Teacher Workload Reports

Following the Workload Challenge, the Department for Education established three independent review groups to look at the three biggest concerns that teachers raised in the Workload Challenge – marking, planning and resources and data management. Their reports were published in March 2016 setting out principles for practice and recommendations for action.<sup>8</sup>

In general, there was a mixed response among participants regarding these workload review reports, with some teachers and senior leaders being more aware of them than others. In terms of teachers, the reports appeared to have been read most commonly by full-time early career teachers. This suggests a higher level of engagement with new strategies and pedagogical developments among newer recruits to the workplace compared with those that have been teaching for many years.

*'There have been new policies implemented for marking and feedback. The Assistant Headteacher is responsible for staff wellbeing and the outcomes from the review reports were very much circulated among staff. Faculty Leaders were asked to [pay] attention to them as the SLT are not always the strongest advocates here of work/life balance'.* (Full-time early career English teacher in a secondary school)

Overall levels of activity within schools (or by individual teachers) in response to the review recommendations appeared to be low.<sup>9</sup> Many of the senior leaders said that they had not implemented specific initiatives as a result of the workload review reports, and

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<sup>8</sup> DfE (2017), 'Reducing teacher workload': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/reducing-teachers-workload/reducing-teachers-workload>

<sup>9</sup> Use of the Workload Review Group reports was also included in the most recent teacher voice omnibus survey: DfE (2017), '[Teacher Voice Omnibus Survey – July 2017](#)', which found that more than a third of senior leaders responding to the survey (36 per cent) had used the independent reports on marking, planning and resources and/or data management as a basis to review current policies. However, more than a quarter (28 per cent) of senior leaders said that they had used none of the methods included in the survey.



some said that they were already doing what was recommended in the reports. The introduction of new initiatives was perceived to create high levels of workload itself, and headteachers felt there needed to be clear benefits prior to communicating the need for change to staff. However, a small number of senior leaders had used the reports as a catalyst to instigate reviews of workload and practices across the school. One headteacher thought that awareness of the reports needed to be raised, suggesting that they should be promoted by DfE through the production of updated versions reflecting new suggestions for workload management.

Two teachers with over eleven years of experience (out of 14 interviewed) were aware of the reports. One reported that changes had been adopted in their school as a result. For example, the school's SLT had fed back a small number of the recommendations around collaboration.

*'After the workforce challenge, we looked at our marking policy again...we asked children what we need to do for them, we looked at what doesn't impact them and pared down our marking...Our [marking] policy directly takes the form of that report and it is quoted within our marking policy. It is the same for our data management policy – our data management was close to the recommendations anyway'. (Assistant Headteacher in a secondary school)*

Having read the reports, one secondary school had created a staff working party, involving staff from all career stages, levels and subjects, to meet and discuss workload issues.<sup>10</sup> There was some cynicism among interviewees that the guidance included in the reports would change in the future, so these interviewees had not read them closely. There was additional feedback that the reviews were not perceived to have addressed explicitly key issues such as a lack of resources, budget constraints or the reduction in administrative and/or support staff, which participants felt contributed to teacher workload in ways that could not be addressed through the adoption of new working practices.

An early career primary school teacher hoped that following the transition process of becoming an academy, there would be 'positive changes' based on the reports, including: senior leaders not to constantly check teacher planning, staff not to be in school before 7.45 am or after 5pm and no work emails to be sent after 6.30pm or during the weekends. However, they were less certain that these ideas would be strictly enforced in reality.

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<sup>10</sup> There was little feedback emerging from this initiative, as this was a new programme of meetings that had only just started.

## 5. Professional Development

When they spoke about access to Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or advice to aid workload reduction, most teachers (31 out of 49) said that they had not accessed CPD courses or advice and 18 said they had done so.

The reasons for not attending CPD tended to be budgetary constraints for the school; both in terms of funding the training, and also funding cover whilst teachers attend training sessions.

### 5.1 Types of CPD Resource Accessed

The eighteen teachers that said they had accessed resources for workload CPD were asked about the types of resources that they used. The most commonly mentioned resource (by 10 teachers) was **internal training** led by experienced members of staff. This included sharing good practice, setting up teaching and learning groups to discuss good practice, implementing staggered marking and 'smart teaching'.

*'The school is very focussed on CPD. We have had a massive change for the better. Now it is researched and evidence based on what we need – it is more engaging, more about discussing good practice. We have a lot of working parties now. There is one for teaching and learning, which is more seminar based looking at how you can improve your teaching. For Pupil Premium students we have been looking at what other schools do and how we can support them better, and spend the money more effectively. The same for homework – we look at what other schools are doing and ask could we do it better'. (Full-time early career geography teacher in a secondary school)*

Four teachers had attended exam board training sessions related to the delivery of new specifications; two had attended training led by external consultants (to develop skills in relation to leading a Department and literacy planning).

Other resources for CPD, mentioned by one teacher each, were:

- *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) community.
- External training for NQT mentors.
- External training – culture of work.
- External subject-related courses.
- Accessing professional body resources.

### **Delivering CPD on managing workload**

Two teachers were directly involved in the delivery of CPD workshops that focused on reducing workload. This included workshops examining effective feedback mechanisms and how to deliver these so that teacher workload is balanced.

*'As part of that I devised a way of marking that drew on comment banks. I looked at how to use these effectively and shared these ideas'* (Part-time science teacher, secondary)

These had been delivered internally to colleagues, and externally at conferences, and local partnership or teaching network meetings. One had published in teaching magazines.

Although this CPD was not always directly related to reducing workload, several of the teachers felt that the skills they developed helped them to manage that workload more effectively. However, there were concerns that internal training sessions were delivered in such a way that was critical of teacher performance, or suggested ideas that were not always realistic in terms of their day-to-day implementation. Others suggested that CPD could be repetitive and lack relevance to their subject. For example, a primary school teacher had attended a workload management training day, but was left disappointed by the experience due its lack of direct application.

*'We thought we were going to go and receive lots of great tips and helpful advice, and ideas of the sorts of things that we could do. But there was nothing practical said to us at all...the speaker was from industry. They didn't have an educational background, they hadn't been a teacher and none of it was relevant to us at all. We thought we were getting the support we wanted and there was nothing. So the thought is there to help us, but nothing practical is coming out of it.'* (Part-time primary teacher with over 11 years' experience)

Some were already implementing the ideas shared during CPD – one part-time teacher felt they were already using all the workload management strategies suggested, so the 'only answer' for them was to reduce working hours to part-time.

*'The exam boards offer twilight sessions now, but this adds to the workload rather than helping it. It is because schools will not pay for teachers to attend in the day so you have to go to training at night...This is unacceptable. You have to use up your own time, there is no support for professional development. There is no pay for it, nothing to cover expenses'* (Part-time science teacher in a secondary school with over 11 years' experience)

## 5.2 Areas for Further Development

Teachers were asked what they would change in future and strategies that they would improve. Suggestions were:

- More administrative staff to support data inputting; reduced data entry requirements.
- Increased PPA time.
- Reduction in the number of staff meetings.
- Better tailored CPD to meet specific needs.
- More consultation of staff from the SLT about CPD requirements and training that would be useful for tackling workload.
- Training on Life after Levels – ideas of what other schools have come up with, how they are implementing/delivering new specifications.
- How to be an effective subject leader.
- Parents having to contact school via a central administrative email and then these messages being filtered, rather than all parents being able to send email directly to teachers personally.
- Staff being encouraged to share more openly and widely with colleagues (e.g. resources and good practice).
- Formal training on new elements of the curriculum such as computer coding in primary schools.
- Support or training on people management and reporting guidance for Heads of Department.
- 'Wellness' days, breakout rooms, a central contact available to talk to when pressure levels are high. *'This doesn't even have to be somebody in school. Somebody you can just drop a note to and ask for a chat. They could relay information back to the people who need to know about it. People are scared to say that I am stressed, it can be seen as a weakness. A mediator would be helpful. One colleague is open about their experience of stress, and this does help others. But for some it is difficult to talk.'* (Part-time science teacher in a secondary school with over 11 years' experience)

## 6. Summary of Findings

The seventy five interviewees involved in this research, including senior leaders, early career and longer-term teachers and part-time teachers, commonly reported high levels of workload that they perceived were only manageable through long working hours (or, for part-time teachers, working on their days 'off' during the week). The drivers of this workload reflected those reported during the Teacher Workload Survey 2016, including planning and marking, data recording and reporting, administration and meetings. Dealing with behavioural and safeguarding issues were also highlighted as adding often unexpected and time-consuming tasks to workload levels.

There were fluctuations reported in workload levels, with particularly busy weeks at the start and end of academic years, during Christmas and at exam periods. High expectations from SLTs were felt by teaching staff to be a significant driver for workload pressures, although it was also acknowledged that SLTs had their own heavy workloads often driven by external requirements such as Ofsted. There appeared to be some form of internalisation of the expectations around workload requirements, in that it was felt to be 'part of the job', particularly for those in senior posts. In addition, there was a common perception that mixed messages between Ofsted requirements and SLT guidance created confusion and frustration for teachers. It was felt that decisions by SLTs to make changes to school strategy to reduce workload tasks such as data recording or evidence reporting were brave or bold, but that these could only be effective if buy-in was generated across the teaching workforce. Those in senior leadership positions felt that they needed to invest time and effort into reviewing policies and procedures in schools and this in itself added to workload, but those who had taken the step felt that there had been reductions in workload as a result.

Overall, low levels of activity were reported in response to the DfE's three workload review reports, although those who had implemented change perceived that this had a positive effect on workload over time. Across teachers there was concern that future guidance would change again, or that little difference would be made to workload by implementing new strategies. A small number of senior leaders had implemented change as a result of the review reports, or had reviewed their own school's practice against the report recommendations and integrated workload reduction into their school development plan, ensuring it was at the forefront of what they do. For a few, this meant that workload was a key consideration in any decision that is made and some had made whole-school radical changes to policies and procedures. Although teaching staff showed low awareness of the reports, many did highlight strategies that had been implemented to address workload issues in their schools. They may not have been aware that these changes could potentially have been made as a result of SLTs reviewing the reports.

Whilst workload was reported to be high, individuals and schools were taking steps to try to manage and reduce it. A wide range of examples were provided by interviewees in

terms of the types of strategy that were out in place individually and across schools more broadly to address workload issues. These tended to focus on:

- Reducing time spent on planning and marking.
- Reducing or spreading assessment data points.
- Managing administrative burdens, and emails in particular.
- Sharing work including planning, the creation of resources and more efficient communications and collaboration.

A few gave examples of workload being integrated into wider approaches, such as introducing wellbeing forums and surveys and introducing online or digital systems to manage administrative duties. Several examples of software were cited which were thought to have an impact on reducing workload. These included strategies to reduce planning and marking, set homework, record feedback, store data and manage documentation.

It was emphasised by senior leaders that learning about different examples of good practice or new strategies being implemented in other schools did not mean that these approaches would be effective in their own institutions. The context of a school, the varying abilities of staff, the existing levels of trust between staff members and attitudes towards change could all contribute to whether or not a new strategy could be introduced successfully in a particular setting.

It was, however, generally agreed that some small and simple strategies were effective in most settings. These included:

- Ensuring that SLT members and senior leaders regularly and clearly acknowledged the time and effort made by teaching staff and any additional hours that they undertook.
- Managing email expectations, including adding delays to email delivery, or setting time limits on when work emails should be sent (e.g. not after 6pm).
- Helping teaching staff to understand that they need to know when to stop and not believe that every lesson plan needs to be perfect, but could be adaptable to reflect learners' needs as they change.

Teaching staff often reported controlling their working hours so that they did not stay late every evening of the week, or did not take work laptops home with them after school. All of the part-time teachers interviewed had either chosen to remain on part-time hours or reduced their working hours so that they could manage their workload during the week. Like their full-time counterparts and senior leaders, they had accepted that a heavy workload was a part of teaching that they doubted would change, and therefore reducing their paid hours meant that they felt able to manage the part-time workload.

Barriers to implementing strategies to reduce workload were identified as:

- Lower numbers of teaching assistants, technical and support staff.
- Resistance to change among the workforce, for example in relation to changes to staff meeting arrangements, or a lack of willingness among teaching staff to share resources and planning.
- Resistance to change from parents, for example, in relation to a reduced homework strategy.
- Budgetary constraints (limiting staffing levels and investment in resources).

In terms of encouraging staff support for change, senior leaders said that it was important to consult with staff directly – to gather their views on the strategies and approaches that they value, and where they think that changes could be made effectively. Furthermore, clear communication to staff of the reasons for new or additional work – and the active support of senior leaders in that work with them leading by example – are significant factors in identifying and implementing strategies that aim to address workload management.

Accessing support and professional development around teacher workload appeared to be limited. Early career teachers said that they generally had not covered workload management during their Initial Teacher Training, and whilst there was some support sought from senior leaders, the majority of this work was led internally. Most senior leaders felt that there was no or little support available, although those who were part of a network or formal partnership arrangement found this to be generally productive and supportive overall (although not necessarily in terms of dealing with workload issues).



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