Teacher workload in 2017: Is a work-life balance achievable?

Introduction and background

For the past 5 years, there has been a teacher recruitment shortage. Reasons for this include: increasing numbers of pupils, graduates finding better-paid jobs elsewhere; and funding cuts. It is clear, however, that for those teachers leaving the profession, workload is a major concern. The lack of a work-life balance has been cited in a number of research studies and has become an increasing problem. The conversion of schools to academies has often placed additional administrative burdens on school staff. This report published by Groupcall explores teachers’ attitudes to their workload and looks at ways in which technology can be best used to reduce the burden.

The data for the study was collected through 2 online surveys; one was a survey of classroom teachers and the other was a survey of members of senior leadership teams (SLTs). A total of 2,497 respondents completed the survey. The vast majority of these (84% of teachers and 84% of SLT) worked in state schools. Fifty-nine per cent of teachers and 33 per cent of SLT members worked in secondary schools, whereas at primary level, 52 per cent of the respondents were members of SLT and 29 per cent were teachers. This means that SLT results may be slightly skewed towards a primary perspective.

Key findings

Teacher workloads

- Respondents were asked whether they felt that they had a healthy work-life balance in their current workplace. Forty-five per cent responded that this was not at all the case and a further 33 per cent responded ‘not really’. Just 3 per cent of respondents felt that they had a healthy work-life balance.
- Teachers were asked how many hours they worked in excess of their contracted hours. On average, respondents worked 24 hours over contracted hours. The largest group (799 teachers) reported working between 11 and 20 hours over contract and a further 529 reported working between 21 and 30 hours over contract.
- Sixty-eight per cent of teachers stated that they always worked during school holidays and 22 per cent said that they often did so. There were no teachers reporting that they never worked during school holidays.
- Teachers were asked what important events they had missed because of workload. Fifty-seven per cent stated that they had missed out on life events and 14 per cent stated that they had missed out on professional development. When asked which life events they had missed, respondents cited a number of examples, including children’s parents evening, socialising during the week and spending time with family.
- The survey responses showed that teachers in all age groups work significantly over their contracted hours. New teachers (those who have been in the profession for between 1 and 5 years), reported working over 20 extra hours a week. For older age groups, the figures tend to increase further.
- When asked whether their workload had changed over the last 5 years, 71 per cent stated that it was significantly worse and 18 per cent reported that it was slightly worse. Just 4.2 per cent felt that the situation was either significantly better or slightly better.
- Teachers were asked to consider how their workloads had changed. Thirty per cent cited an increase in marking as the main reason for the increase in workload. A further 22 per cent cited administrative tasks and the same number cited data management. Thirteen per cent cited planning as the main reason.

Senior leadership team workloads

- Six per cent of SLT members felt that they had a healthy work-life balance. However, 41 per cent reported that this was not at all the case, and 31 per cent that it was not really the case.
- Similarly to teachers, SLT’s most time-consuming tasks were marking (43%), planning (32%) and data (27%). Twenty-one per cent of SLT reported meetings as being the most time-consuming task.
- Seventy-three per cent of SLT reported always working in school holidays and 72 per cent reported that they always worked at weekends. Just one SLT member said that they never worked in the school holidays.
- The average time in post for SLT who responded to the survey was 21 years. Forty-three per cent reported that workload had always been an issue, but 52 per cent said that it had not always been an issue.
- Sixty-one per cent of SLT felt that workload had become significantly worse over the past 5 years. Just 4 per cent felt that it was a little better or slightly better. When asked what had changed, SLT reported a number of issues including increased pressure of student outcomes, greater amounts of assessment data, and day to day urgent staffing issues.
- In 2016, the DfE’s Workload Challenge Survey led to the formation of 3 independent working groups which produced reports on how teachers could reduce workload in the key areas of marking, planning and data management. This
Reducing teacher workload through technology

- The most successful strategies for reducing workload, as identified by teachers were: reducing written lesson plans; use of support staff; increased planning and preparation time; less marking; and use of software for tracking pupil progress. Based on these strategies, the report makes a number of specific recommendations.
- If teachers find themselves marking for the sake of internal expectations rather than because it will benefit their students, they should stop. Using a combination of peer and self-assessed tasks in addition to verbal feedback will help cut down written feedback.
- Administrative tasks can be made more efficient by integrating technology to automate certain tasks and avoid doubling up on work (see final section for examples).
- Five-minute lesson plans are effective and sharing plans between colleagues can help reduce workload throughout a department.
- Committed teachers can find themselves involved in too many clubs and extracurricular activities. Although rewarding, these responsibilities can be too much to handle in addition to a demanding job. Teachers need to know their limits and, whilst expressing enthusiasm, admit that they are struggling.
- Teachers and members of SLT need to be aware of what Ofsted does and does not expect, as set out in Ofsted’s myth busters document. For example, Ofsted does not require teachers to provide individual lesson plans to inspectors. Neither does it ask schools to undertake a specific amount of lesson observation.

Will a work-life balance ever exist?

- The good news is that there are some strategies that teachers have tried and which have been effective in reducing their workload, such as a reduction of written lesson plans. However, many of those who say they have a better work-life balance now feel this way because they have stepped down in their roles, or gone from full time to part time.
- However, when asked in the survey whether they felt positive about the future of teaching, 55 per cent of SLT members said no. Just 13 per cent reported feeling positive; 32 per cent said that they were unsure.

Reducing teacher workload through technology

- Sixty-four per cent of teachers said they had appropriate technology in place allowing them to work effectively from home. This gives them access to school systems to input the data into the school’s management information system (MIS), allowing them some flexibility on where they work the hours over their contracted time. Of those that did not have appropriate technology which allowed them to work from home, 71 per cent said they would welcome technology that helps them to do so more efficiently.
- It would appear that although technology has the potential to reduce workload, lack of training or frequent changes of software could have the opposite effect.

Edtech to reduce workload

- A number of Edtech companies have worked to develop software to reduce teacher and SLT workload, as detailed below.
- Groupcall has developed Emerge, which frees teachers from the confines of school machines, allowing MIS data to be accessed at home or on the go. Its mobility and accessibility mean that it has significant potential to reduce teacher workloads. The company has also produced Messenger, which allows school staff to easily use the data stored in their MIS to reach out to the parents of their students. Attendance, behaviour and achievements can all be communicated quickly and efficiently, keeping parents fully engaged with the school.
- Frog is a cloud-based platform which enables teachers to store and build resources, set homework, manage pupil progress, and manage their lessons. It is estimated that Frog’s self-marking homework tool has saved teachers in the UK 2,305.55 days of marking so far in the 10 month period since September 2016.
- CPOMS is the market leading software application for monitoring child protection, safeguarding and pastoral and welfare issues. Working alongside a school’s existing safeguarding processes, it helps with the management and recording of child protection, behavioural issues, bullying, special educational needs and domestic issues. This recording means that reports can be more quickly and more efficiently produced for stakeholders, including Ofsted.
- Magellan drives out inefficiency by bringing together apps, resources, files and more with personalised dashboards through which teachers can access all the applications they require, their personal and shared files, emails, personal timetable, homework planner, school information etc. all from one intuitive interface. A single sign-on means teachers need only log in once to access all systems and resources. One teacher described it as a ‘nice one-stop shop for everything we use in school’.
- E2P+SEND helps school leaders, teachers, parents and their children take ownership of personalised learning. It is possible to record and save evidence instantly to the assessment package (video, photo, and audio) using the latest mobile App technology. It enables teachers to attribute evidence easily to children, including a description of learning outcomes and developmental stage to facilitate accurate assessment. One teacher described how the main benefit had been ‘to support staff knowledge about meeting children’s needs and interests’.
- Epraise was originally created so that teachers did not have to manually calculate how many rewards points students, classes and years had. Following early success, its approach was replicated in other areas, such as seating plans and parents evenings.
- CENTURY reduces the amount of time that teachers need to spend planning lessons and preparing materials. Its AI algorithms learn how each student learns and plot the most effective route through learning material, providing teachers with a unique learning path based on their individual needs.
- Grofar has been developed to help schools to meet the requirements of the government’s careers guidance and the Gatsby benchmarks. It produces reports and insightful overviews of a school’s careers service and ensures schools are always Ofsted ready.

The full document can be downloaded from: https://www.groupcall.com/hubs/Groupcall-%20Teacher%20Workloads.pdf?l=1499944974984