1 Introduction

The background to this study

For some years now, teachers in England and Wales have been expressing increasing concern over the workload level required of them, and over the impact their workload level is having on their professional and private lives. A number of projects, mainly under the “reducing bureaucratic burdens” label, have been addressed at mitigating teacher workloads at the systemic level. In particular, a major study by PricewaterhouseCoopers, carried out through 2001, has provided Government with valuable data on the workloads teachers in England and Wales currently face.

However, professional associations have also been pressing Government to implement a new contract for teachers which includes some assurances at the level of the individual teacher that workloads can be moderated.

Parallel developments in Scotland

Meanwhile, parallel developments have been proceeding in Scotland. In September 1999 the Scottish Parliament set up a Committee of Inquiry into Professional Conditions of Service for Teachers (the “McCrone Committee”), which reported in May 2000. The agreement adopted by the employers, the professional associations and Government in Scotland in January 2001 provided for:

- the formal introduction of a 35 hour week for all teachers from 1 August 2001
- a phased reduction in maximum class contact time to 22 hours per week equalised across the primary, secondary and special sectors
- during the phasing period, the class contact commitment of a teacher will be complemented by an allowance of personal time for preparation and correction: the allowance will be no less than one third of the teacher’s actual class contact commitment
- all tasks which do not require the teacher to be on the school premises can be carried out at a time and place of the teacher’s choosing: teachers will notify the appropriate manager of their intention in this respect; and
- from August 2006, at the earliest, the contractual obligations of teachers will be expressed in relation solely to a 35 hour week within which a maximum of 22 hours will be devoted to class contact.

The 2002/03 negotiations

As a result of these developments, it is now looking increasingly likely that the current round of deliberations by the School Teachers’ Review Body [STRB] will lead to such recommendations on workload being made to the Secretary of State for Education. The Secretary of State herself has expressed sympathy with the workload issues faced by teachers. However, there has remained some doubt about what teachers themselves actually think.
about their workloads, and what steps they believe should be taken to reduce the burdens on them.

The Implementation Report

In order to address this doubt, the National Union of Teachers [NUT] commissioned John Atkins, one of the authors of this Report, to carry out a brief study of the implementation of McCrone in Scotland, and report on how a similar agreement might be framed in England.

This report (the “Implementation Report”) was submitted to the NUT, and by them to the STRB, in late 2001.¹ It demonstrated that the McCrone approach could work in Scotland, given sufficient goodwill from all parties, and provided an effective way to mitigate teacher workload within the proposed framework of Scottish legislation and regulation.

Since however the employment context for teachers in England and Wales is different – for example the contractual limit of 1265 hours “directed time” had no direct equivalent in Scotland pre-McCrone – the fieldwork for the Implementation Report also included visits to a small number of schools in England. As a result of these visits, and of the different contractual position, the recommendations of the Implementation Report for England and Wales differed slightly from the McCrone position identified above:

- limits to class contact of 22 hours per week for full time teachers
- administrative support for teachers, in the ratio of three hours’ admin time per full time teacher
- specific provision for CPD, either in the form of a 40th week (which may or may not be contractual) or through more efficient use of the 39th week then is usual at present
- adoption of the McCrone “location of work” clause allowing teachers to work off-site when the nature of their work
- a suggested allocation of one hour marking and preparation time for every two hours direct teaching, of which half is to be provided within directed time; this gives a contractual week of

  22 hours contact + 5 hours marking and prep. + 5 hours other duties
  = 1265 hours within the contract, plus
  5 hours marking and prep. in teachers’ own time,
  for a total of 38 hours in the working week.

The Implementation Report was produced to a tight timescale, and – as already noted – relatively little fieldwork in schools in England and Wales was carried out. Moreover, the


² Excluding the possibility of a 40th CPD week.
fieldwork had preceded the drafting of the recommendations above, and had therefore not been able to test these recommendations explicitly.

This present study

In adopting the Implementation Report for onward transmission to the STRB, therefore, the NUT Executive requested that a further thirty schools in England and Wales should be visited to assess teachers’ likely response to the Implementation Report’s recommendations.

By agreement, the study did not cover the Implementation Report’s recommendation on CPD. Discussions on CPD are being taken forward in another forum.

The study design

The survey was designed around interviews and focus group discussions with teachers in the schools chosen. Out of the thirty schools approached, twenty-eight schools agreed to take part. Primary, secondary and special schools were all included. Annex 1 gives a summary of the schools visited: they included a Beacon school, two specialist schools, a school that had recently been successfully judged out of Special Measures, and schools that fell into none of these groups. Our view is that they are a representative sample of state schools in England and Wales in 2002.

The interviews and discussions were carried out with teachers rather than headteachers, usually in staff rooms during lunchtimes and after school: the sizes of the focus groups varied from two or three teachers to over twenty.

The questions used in the fieldwork are given in Annex 2.

Because of the nature of the information collection approach adopted, it was neither intended nor possible to draw up detailed “questionnaire-style” analyses of hours worked by teachers. In any event, much such information has already been collected by previous projects, including the PricewaterhouseCoopers study already referred to. Instead, however, the three researchers involved formed an overall (and largely common) impression of typical workload patterns in schools in England and Wales in 2002, and that is what is reported here.

Acknowledgements

We are not unaware of the irony of imposing upon teachers’ lunchtimes and after school time to ask them to talk to us about teacher workload; if we had been unaware, it would speedily have been brought to our attention.

Nevertheless, we must report that we received full and cheerful cooperation in our study from all the schools we visited. Headteachers kindly made full arrangements and were then happy for us to meet with their colleagues unaccompanied; colleagues, on their part, were remarkably generous with their time and even prepared to be appreciative of our taking the trouble to carry the study out. We are very grateful to all of them.
The NUT is also grateful to the Association of Teachers and Lecturers for contributing the time of Mike Nichol to this study.
2 The study outcomes

Introduction

Although the five questions in Annex 2 are distinct, there are clearly overlaps between them. In addition, the nature of interviews and focus groups means that inevitably our discussions spilled out beyond the five questions formally put to include other peripheral areas of interest and concern. Nevertheless, and at the cost of some repetition, it will be clearest if we present our findings under headings which broadly correspond to the questions asked.

Teachers’ current workloads

There was almost uniformity of views across all schools visited - secondary, primary, special - about the current level of workload experienced by teachers, its nature and causes. The basic loading varied between primary and secondary schools but teachers’ response to it was uniform.

Contact time

Although some primary schools were starting to explore non-contact time for all teachers, many primary schools were still operating full, 25-hour weeks for teacher and pupil alike. Thus at one extreme one school in the sample actually provided one session (half a day) of non-contact time for each teacher each week (bringing contact time to around 22 hours). However, none of the others came close to this level, with levels (in descending order) of

- one session every three weeks
- twenty minutes per week during occasional assemblies
- no non-contact time at all

being quoted.

It is clear that for many primary schools, the link between class and teacher is still absolute. Where teachers are “released”, it is as often as not a supply teacher, or a colleague, who “looks in”. Teachers moreover often feel obliged to provide lesson plans and materials for these sessions, so that – for instance – a teacher being released to attend a course has to do all the preparation (and marking) for the day he or she will miss on top of attending the course and carrying out what follow-up work results from it. Some teachers interviewed suggested that this made release for INSET less attractive: having planned for the day (in rather more detail than usual) and undertaken to do the marking and record keeping that resulted from it, they might as well teach the day and be done.

Only in the one school that provided one session per week release for each teacher was a proper, “permanent” arrangement made to cover the session with a contracted teacher who undertook his/her own marking and preparation for the session concerned. This is obviously a much more satisfactory arrangement, but has resource consequences for schools.
In secondary schools, the picture was different. As might be expected, all secondary schools in the sample provided non-contact time of around two or three hours per week (increasing as teachers took on management and other responsibilities). Schools are also much more careful about ensuring that teachers receive some of this non-contact time; in most of the sample, arrangements for staff cover were designed to ensure that teachers never lost all their "free periods" however difficult the emergency.

Marking and preparation

Here again there was considerable commonality of view.

We had hoped that the ratio of 1 hour's marking and preparation for every two hours' class contact, which had been recommended in the Implementation Report, might be reflected in current practice. However, although many interviewees acknowledged that the ratio of one hour's preparation and marking for every two hours contact was a reasonable target most interviewees believed they did more. The more usual ratio was 1:1, across both primary and secondary schools.

Why were teachers doing more than they believed was appropriate? The answers were many and varied, but a number of common themes recurred. These included:

- the demands of SATs and external assessments generally
- over-elaborate, and in teachers' views unnecessary, detail in lesson planning and preparation
- over-monitoring of pupils' progress, leading to complicated and extensive monitoring records that were in many instances never subsequently looked at
- a never-ending supply of revisions to syllabuses and curricula, and "initiative overload" generally.

Lesson planning, preparation, and monitoring was seen as largely driven by OFSTED. What is interesting here is the variation in practice between schools. Some of this seems, particularly in primary schools, to depend on the confidence or even bull-headedness of the Headteacher. One headteacher interviewed informally in the margins of the fieldwork implied she had told OFSTED that the level of record-keeping would be lower than they might expect, but that the level was set by her and her Governing Body. The latter would be pleased to stand accountable for it in the context of a formal, specific discussion on the overall resource available for the school, and did the Inspector want her to arrange such a discussion? At the other extreme, according to the reports of their staff some headteachers apparently believe OFSTED "required" highly elaborate minute-by-minute planning and subsequent recording of the detailed progress of the lesson, even though by those teachers' own admission this adds nothing to the value of the lesson delivered.

Many teachers, and observers, also allege that individual OFSTED inspection teams vary widely in what they expect by way of plans and records when they visit schools. Schools therefore over-prepare in order to be sure that they are not caught at a disadvantage through being allocated a particularly zealous team.
It is hard not to regard OFSTED, or the DFES, as culpable here. Variations in standards of lesson planning and subsequent recording have been so well documented, for so many years, that the need for a simple, authoritative statement of “good practice” seems self-evident. Presumably it would also help OFSTED Inspectors if schools recorded their plans (and the fruition of those plans) in similar ways. For that matter, more LEAs also might consider offering guidance on this point.

Equally, some teachers saw the increase in accountability as symptomatic of a deep lack of trust in teachers that Government, and OFSTED, seemed to want to foster rather than allay. Teachers do not resent time spent in preparation but do resent the massive increase in paperwork related to e.g. weekly, termly planning sheets, the collection and filing of evidence, literacy and numeracy hour documentation, individual work plans for children and the massive bureaucracy around special needs. It is common to hear teachers say that it is not necessarily the hours they work which they resent but what they spend their time doing. Less bureaucracy would lead to more time spent on teaching and learning.

The scale and scope of revisions to curricula and other initiatives has also been well-documented. Nevertheless accounts given by individual teachers still have power to shock. One secondary teacher produced a list she personally had been involved in during her school career, which included (in no particular order):

- AS levels
- A2 levels
- GCSE (five different syllabuses in eight years, all requiring “from scratch” preparation)
- KS3 literacy and numeracy
- KS4 vocational strategies
- New Opportunities Fund ICT training.

She pointed out that this list only applied to curriculum-related initiatives – she had deliberately not become involved in whole school initiatives such as “beacon status”, etc.

Another teacher pointed out that despite the plethora of new announcements, initiatives and requirements launched annually in her entire career she had never seen a notice or announcement requesting her to “stop doing something”. Instead, teachers had to guess that some initiatives were no longer required; rather than being formally discontinued, they were allowed quietly to lapse in the hope that no-one would ask about them. She saw this as intellectually dishonest on the part of Government, and suspected that no central account was actually kept of what Government has asked schools to do.

Primary school teachers in particular also drew attention to the difficulties in keeping up with curriculum changes in the smaller primary school. A school with eight teachers does simply not have the same planning resource available as one with twenty-five. LEAs may sometimes be culpable in running too many small schools – but the teachers themselves are not. Why is more account not taken of school size when requirements are laid on schools?
It would be simple, thought one teacher, for OFSTED to set different levels of planning requirement for large and small schools respectively. It would also focus the minds of those in authority of the true advantages and disadvantages of small schools: most of the latter are overcome by the unremitting (and unacknowledged) personal effort of those who teach there.

**Overall workloads**

If indeed the teaching : marking/preparation ratio is nearer 1:1 than 2:1, this has important consequences for teachers’ working hours. For marking and preparation are not the only non-teaching requirements laid on teachers: there are also many meetings, parents’ evenings, etc. to attend (particularly in those schools where Heads are zealous about “requiring” 1265 hours – see below). What does this mean for typical teacher working weeks?

Quantitatively, teacher working weeks have been tabulated extensively in the PricewaterhouseCoopers work already referred to. However it puts this work in context to list out three typical working patterns actually referred to by teachers in our sample:

- 6:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. in school, plus two hours per night and most of Sunday (“the hour between 6:30 a.m. and 7:30 a.m., when most of my colleagues arrive, is particularly valuable. After then I am interrupted too often to get much done.”)
- 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. plus two hours a night and weekends (“it seems like all weekend every weekend”)
- 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. plus three hours per night (“I try and keep my weekends free – I’m not paid enough to get stressed.”)

These patterns put flesh on the bones of what “sixty hour working weeks” actually represent.

Finally, it should be noted that teachers feel they have little or no control over their workloads. It is this lack of control not just the number of hours that leads to stress. Several said that the only way they could make any space was in cutting down on lesson preparation and winging it. They alleged that cutting down on paper work under the current regime and especially for OFSTED was simply not possible (though see the discussion above). So if any short cuts are taken it is the quality of teaching that takes the hit.

**Holidays**

We specifically asked about patterns of working in holidays, as well as term time.

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3 Head of department, secondary school.
4 Primary school class teacher.
5 Secondary science subject teacher
Most teachers were agreed that half terms were largely sacrificed to “catching up”. Out of the week usually allotted, perhaps one or two days were useful to form a “long weekend”. The other three or four were usually spent on school work, often in school.

Teachers did accept that their major holidays between each term were longer than in other professions, and that they did take much of this time as “real holiday” (though having said that, secondary schools also reported that on any day in the summer between 10 and 20% of staff would probably look in at some time). However, some of the teachers we spoke to seemed to have “got wind” of the arguments in the PwC report seeming to suggest that these holidays were perhaps overgenerous, or compensated in some way for the exceptionally long hours during term time.

The reactions of these teachers were, perhaps, predictable. Some said straight out that they would leave the profession at once if the holidays were reduced – and added that they had thought it was proving difficult to recruit and retain teachers at present. Others pointed out that the core task of teaching is a “performance” role, and not therefore to be compared with other, more office-based professional jobs. Unlike many “office” professionals, teachers cannot schedule their workload to reflect how they are feeling on a particular day – leaving writing that important report until they have a complete day on which they are feeling fresh, or keeping back some “routine” work for the morning after a hard night. Instead, their pre-set schedule demands peak class performance at identified times, week in and week out, and the cumulative stress this performance (even for the most prepared teacher) is considerable. Longer-than-average periods of the year to regenerate after this cumulative stress, our interviewees thought, are no more than reasonable.

Finally, it will not be surprising that many teachers find it hard to balance work and family, and constantly have to choose between the two. Two newly qualified teachers in our sample actually said they would give up work before they started a family. Interestingly, this confirms anecdotal evidence more generally that teachers who leave the profession when their children are born are less prepared to return to work later: if this trend is verifiable, it represents a huge potential loss to the profession of highly skilled and experienced teachers. Making the profession more attractive to “post-family returners” might usefully be the subject of a further study, in which DFES as well as the professional associations might take an interest.

Some exceptional schools

As a counterpoint to the discussion above it is also worth referring briefly to two particular schools in our sample. These two schools produced figures way in excess of the already considerable workload regarded as the norm described above.

In one Beacon primary school, teachers were marking three pieces of work per child per night (i.e. 450 a week). In another school, which had a top OFSTED and wanted to stay on top, they marked an English and a Maths book each night. Both schools were motivated by a desire not to let their own results slip and believed that trying to “cut back” to “only” one
hour of marking/preparation for one hour teaching [sic] would mean inevitable slippage from the position they had achieved. They may be right, but at what human cost?

**Reducing workloads**

At this point in the discussions in each school, we were able to introduce the recommendations made in the Implementation Report, and ask for teachers’ views on them.

First, however, we had to ask formally whether teachers considered their current working hours reasonable. Very few teachers we spoke to did. This is hardly surprising, given some of the workloads reported on page 9.

**Overall views on teachers’ hours**

What hours *would* teachers consider as reasonable? Not surprisingly, answers varied between individuals; newer teachers, and those without family responsibilities, were often prepared to work more. But it should be firmly stated – though it will come as no surprise to those with knowledge of the profession – that teachers do *not* expect, or even want, to work “school hours”. Most teachers, judging by our response, think it is reasonable to spend the equivalent of:

- one extra hour in school per day, either before or after the children are present (depending on personal circumstances)
- a further two hours in the evening marking and preparing, five nights per week (typically Sunday to Thursday)
- one or two extra hours over the weekend, now and then, if there is something special to do.

Depending on school timetables, they regard this as not an unreasonable voluntary workload (say 40 – 45 hours) by the standards of other professionals.

**Limiting class contact hours**

Given the above workloads, what scope did teachers identify for limiting class contact hours?

As might be expected, the position was different between primary and secondary schools. All teachers would welcome some limit on class contact and most would want to see this reflected contractually. It was difficult however, to get all teachers to quantify what they would like, so that it could be compared with the Implementation Report’s recommendations.

*Primary school* teachers, particularly those who received little or no release from classes at the moment, thought they deserved a minimum of one session per week for preparation within school time. This represents around 2 hours in most schools, and is close to the corresponding Implementation Report recommendation. Moreover they were quite specific about how this would need to be implemented.
First, to state the obvious, teachers would be required to cover the class. Employing teaching assistants helps in class management, but teaching assistants cannot take the class to allow non-contact time for the teacher. Indeed, there is a real additional loading on a teacher who also has to manage a teaching assistant (albeit one which is well worth while in terms of overall class performance and therefore the satisfaction that the teacher gains from the job).

These views, expressed to us in March and April 2002, have since been confirmed (if confirmation is needed) by the study of teaching assistants carried out by the University of Warwick for the NUT, and by an OFSTED report on teaching assistants based on the experience of OFSTED inspectors.

Moreover, teachers were very wary that supply teachers might be used to cover their non-contact time. The point has already been made in the context of in-service training; but teachers pointed out that release from teaching for one session needed to include release from the preparation of and marking for that session. This could only be accomplished if the teacher covering the session took responsibility for a defined area of the curriculum, and delivered all the professional content for that area in that session (as, obviously, happens in secondary schools). This in turn implied that the teacher needed to be permanently employed by the school, and permanently assigned to the relevant classes. In schools which currently do not make this provision, one extra teacher for every nine currently employed would be required.\(^7\)

One way to accomplish this might be to employ specialist teachers (e.g. science, PE, music). However – and thinking ahead – interviewees were concerned that the job of “releasing teachers from contact” needed to be attractive in its own right if it was to attract high calibre teachers. Primary teachers expect to have responsibility for a class, and having responsibility for nine classes in any one week might not be attractive. In particular, such teachers might want to progress to “whole-class” jobs and might not be able to do so easily if their current post involved teaching science only to nine different classes in the week.

On the other hand, teachers felt primary schools should not move away from the “class teacher model” just to secure non-contact time.

Clearly, more work needs to be done on the way in which primary schools might operate under a “90% contact” model, and we would not claim to have fully investigated this issue.

Secondary school teachers are of course in a different position. All secondary school teachers in our sample already receive non-contact time allocations at around the 10% level, probably more. On paper, therefore, the Implementation Report recommendation to limit contact hours for these teachers to 22 per week would do little more than confirm present practice.

\(^6\) “Teaching assistants: a survey analysed for the National Union of Teachers.” Dr S Neill, University of Warwick, April 2002.

\(^7\) Since this teacher himself/herself would need to be offered one session of non-contact out of the ten.
A contractual limit to contact time would, of course, have the effect of guaranteeing some of teachers’ non-contact time from “poaching” for staff cover. However teachers pointed out that good supply teachers were difficult to recruit in many areas: teachers would not want to “stand on their rights” not to cover for colleagues in their “guaranteed” non-contact time if the result was a riot.8

In summary, therefore, there was general endorsement for the principle of limiting class contact hours as about the only way in which teachers could be guaranteed protection against being overworked – though how this guarantee could be delivered in practice, without damaging children’s education, was less clear to some.

Guaranteed time for marking and preparation

If class contact is to be limited, then it is important that the time freed up should not be “sucked up” in other duties, but should be allowed for marking and preparation.

As already noted, teachers accepted that their present workloads were unreasonable, and that they should be helped to move towards a fairer work-life balance. Most accepted that, although reductions in meetings, planning sessions, parents’ evenings etc. might contribute to this, most such reductions had already been taken over the years (whether in response to industrial action or, more helpfully, through heads’ acknowledgement of teachers’ workload issues). The only way in which workloads could now be reduced was by reducing the ratio between actual teaching and marking/preparation away from 1:1 and nearer to the 2:1 proposed by the Implementation Report.

Guaranteeing some of this time within the school week would indeed be helpful: it would send a signal to headteachers and Governors that any contractual reduction in class contact was not to be swallowed up in meetings and planning sessions. Indeed, if – as the Secretary of State has argued – contractual reductions in class contact are not implemented, then guaranteed time during the school week for marking and preparation will have to stand in their stead.

However, what teachers in our sample really wanted, and needed, was guidance as to how their marking and preparation might be brought into line with a 1:2 target given external expectations. To summarise, teachers did not want it “suggested” to them that they aim towards a 1:2 ratio: they wanted it demonstrated to them that 1:2 could be enough.

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8 We note that some secondary schools are experimenting with “bulk supervision” in the school hall of pupils whose teachers are absent. Up to 150 pupils or more can be supervised, it is claimed, by one duty member of the senior management team. There were no such schools in our sample, but it might be interesting to investigate under what conditions this approach can be made to work. An alternative approach might be to pay teachers at the supply rate when they exceed their contractual hours: we are aware of one school, again not in the sample, where this is already being done.
“Squaring the circle”

Put very bluntly, teachers are fed up at being asked to “square the circle” on workload. Surveys are taken which indicate that teachers’ weekly hours are excessive; the fact that these hours are excessive is acknowledged nationally; but the major cause of these excessive hours is not grasped or tackled.

If a teacher who teaches 25 hours (or even 22) is putting in one hour’s marking and preparation for every hour’s teaching, then his or her workload is already excessive before anything is added on top. Teachers would like those responsible for setting standards for preparation, marking and recording – and for imposing frequent revisions to these standards and to syllabuses more generally, as already noted – just to start by acknowledge this point.

Thereafter those responsible might get together and show teachers how all that they are required to do can be accomplished within thirty minutes for every one hour lesson. If those responsible (principally OFSTED, QCA and DFES itself) can do this, then the workload issue is resolved at a stroke.

Until this happens, teachers feel there is a real danger that workload and “bureaucracy busting” initiatives are merely cosmetic.

One further point. As already noted, it is important for contractual terms to provide for some guaranteed time for marking and preparation within the 1265 hours limit – particularly if guaranteed limits to teacher contact time are not adopted. But it should not be assumed that teachers take much notice of the 1265 hour limit on their contracts, even hedged as it is with qualifications. The most that can be said is that some headteachers, under pressure from their schools’ union representatives, have reviewed the number of meetings, planning sessions, etc. they hold with the 1265 limit in mind. This is not without value, but is not seen as having a major impact on teachers.

Incidentally, in one school in our sample it was suggested that the headteacher was requiring teachers to stay on site for a total of 1265 hours per year, by remaining behind on Monday and Wednesday of each week to carry out lesson preparation and other administrative tasks. Although this is not a general pattern, it may happen in more schools than is commonly believed.

Freedom to go off-site

Our discussions about giving teachers freedom to go off-site when they are not required to be present were consistent with the emerging picture above. Teachers commonly expressed one of two reactions to this suggestion:

• there is no time to go off site - most teachers work from 8 to 5 with no break for lunch; or

• total bemusement.
In particular, teachers in the latter group (largely primary school teachers) believed that going off site either to do school work or for personal reasons was considered to invite suspicion of “skiving”.

After lengthier discussion teachers appeared to warm to the concept – as a theory. In particular, they articulated the argument that if they were required to put in the tremendously long hours that appear currently to be expected of them during evenings and weekends it was not unreasonable for them to be allowed off-site during any non-contact time they might have. Indeed, secondary teachers in particular acknowledged that on the rare occasions when they had to go off-site for personal reasons during the school day, and had time to do so, there was never a problem. However most teachers believed that it would be a long time before reductions in workload made this a frequent occurrence.

Interestingly, one school (already referred to) thought that the right to be offsite when duties permit would force the end of the after-school sessions on Monday and Wednesday referred to, which would indeed be a real benefit to them. One of the few remaining benefits of school teaching is that it can allow teachers to fit their working hours, long as they are, around family commitments. Going promptly at 3:45 p.m., and putting in the hours later when children are in bed, has real advantages as a work pattern for some teachers.

In general, therefore, teachers welcomed the Implementation Report recommendation on being allowed off-site – if they could ever have the time to take advantage of it.

**Administrative support**

Our discussions about administrative support were some of the most interesting of the project.

In general, teachers seem to be ambivalent about administrative support. Whilst no one likes administration, teachers are very poor at suggesting what or who could take the burden off them. They are not particularly good at analysing the jobs they do in conceptual terms – why should they be, given the time pressure on them? – and therefore do not tend to distinguish between what is in place in their school and what might be.

To take one example, where there is a policy on collecting money teachers are happy to let others do it. The system works well, and teachers are happy with it. However where collecting money is still a teacher’s responsibility teachers cannot easily see how this could be otherwise. This may be because they know there is no resource to implement it. It follows that teachers themselves – and arguably their headteachers – are not always going to be best placed to come up with suggestions for passing bureaucratic responsibilities onto administrative staff.
Typing and photocopying is another example. Most said that typing and photocopying services are technically available to them, and many teachers use them. However some teachers prefer to do their own. This is for any one of at least three reasons:

- because the staff who would provide the service are general administrative staff who serve the whole school, and are themselves over burdened, so teachers do not like to ask
- because they have to put in an order a couple of days in advance, and the round of teaching and preparation does not permit that kind of notice any more (if it ever did!)
- because very many teachers now prepare their work on computer at home, so no “typing” is required.

The last point is interesting in another context. In retrospect, it would have been illuminating to ask teachers in all the schools we visited what proportion of them had computers at home. Our impression is that by now virtually all teachers do, and that they were purchased before the various schemes for “preferred suppliers” and income tax rebates were put in place. (Indeed one interviewee was scathing about her experience with a “preferred supplier” and was on the point of ditching her “preferred supplier” computer and buying a replacement on the High Street.) As confirmed desktop users all, it occurs to us that the current “laptops for teachers” schemes might be in danger of supplying too little of the wrong equipment too late.

Teachers were also concerned that administrative support would be provided at the expense of other staff support to teachers. It is clear that teaching assistants on the one hand, and technician support on the other, makes a real contribution to the quality of learning in schools – without necessarily reducing teacher workload, as already noted. Interestingly, the standard “primary-secondary” split should not be assumed to apply: secondary schools are starting to show an interest in using teaching assistants more extensively, based on their special needs/inclusion experience, while primary schools are starting to recognise the importance of technician support for science and IT.

It is perhaps to the credit of the teachers who expressed this point of view that they would rather see teaching assistants and technicians employed to support their pupils’ learning than administrative staff employed to support them directly.

To summarise, however, our conclusion would be that teachers’ support (or lack of support) for administrative spending should not be taken as conclusive evidence that the Implementation Report recommendation for three hours of administrative support per teacher is misplaced. Part of the problem is that not enough schools have invested in administrative support for them (or their teachers) to judge.

Interestingly, the one secondary school in our sample that had invested considerably in administrative support could demonstrate that it provided real benefits to its teachers – a view that the teachers in that school themselves shared. However clearly one school is not a large enough sample on which to base a judgement. Perhaps the use of administrative staff to support teachers should be reviewed further.
Nevertheless, it seems clear that teachers do not view administrative support as having the same potential impact on their lives as the other factors referred to in this report.
3 Teacher workload and teacher morale

Introduction

Although teacher morale was not a direct concern of our fieldwork, during the project it became clear that there was a polarisation in the levels of morale of the schools within our sample. This had an effect not so much on the workload teachers experienced but rather in their attitude towards it. Since much of the effect of excessive workload is in how that workload is perceived – rather than in the number of hours that an observer might record with a stopwatch – the following, necessarily anecdotal observations may be of interest.

The “high morale” schools

In the best schools – those inspired by dynamic, sympathetic or just highly competent headteachers – teachers still enjoy their work. This is particularly noticeable in schools whose pupils are demanding, or whose catchment area is socially disadvantaged. There might almost be said to be a “wartime spirit” in these schools. To push the metaphor, teachers are working immensely hard to maintain “business as usual”; every new Government initiative, OFSTED inspection or change to the curriculum is another air raid; but people who have been up all night fire-fighting are still cheerful when they come to work the next morning.

In schools such as these, there seems to be a “watershed” of around two or three years’ teaching. After teachers have been teaching for this length of time (and have not left either the school or the profession), they are completely dedicated and nothing cannot be dealt with. The only Achilles heel for these teachers is ill health; they simply do not have time or energy to look after themselves.

It is also interesting that in these “high morale” schools headteachers often take a strong lead in mitigating teacher workload by being robust about what they and their staff will and will not do. As already noted on page 7, one headteacher reported that OFSTED inspectors do not insist on (e.g.) over-detailed lesson planning, assessment and recording if headteachers state firmly that it is “not their policy”. Providing the school is succeeding comfortably in achieving its targets, the inspectors feel that they cannot insist. Clearly the plans (or whatever) are not necessary. However she did feel that these “transgressions” will be thrown back at her should her school ever miss its targets.

The “low morale” schools

Some of the other schools we visited portrayed quite a different picture. In these schools, staff were just exhausted and demoralised. Although their hours were no longer, they sat far heavier on the teachers concerned: the spirit was one of siege rather than wartime. In these schools, each new initiative or curriculum revision was more like a massive blow to the castle walls. Resistance is futile and sooner or later the walls are going to come down.
These teachers were more likely to complain about their hours, rather than simply comment on them. Many were making plans to retire or leave the profession. Some feared marital or family difficulties. Teachers with families commented that it is bad when one’s partner is not a teacher (because they do not understand) but arguably worse when he or she is (since then no-one spends any time with the children). Many appeared physically “ground down”. Paradoxically, one of the schools in our sample with the most depressed teachers had recently achieved a massive turn around in its reputation and results. However it had just dawned on the staff that the exceptional effort of the previous few years would now be required for the foreseeable future if the good results were to be maintained.

None of the schools we visited were close to collapse, as some inner city schools are reported to be. Many however had standing teacher vacancies that they could not fill (including promoted posts in some cases).

One case which stands out in our mind is a school which had employed a Bulgarian national with no degree, nor for that matter any recognised teacher training qualification, on “long term cover” for a post which had proved repeatedly impossible to fill. Although this arrangement had worked surprisingly well, there remained day-to-day difficulties over language and culture that were difficult to overcome.

Although not strictly relevant to our study, difficulties in teacher supply have a real bearing on the workload within, and general morale of, a school. Schools that are repeatedly unable to fill vacancies satisfactorily place increasing loads on existing staff, who then may leave in turn, exacerbating the problem.

There are signs of a particularly worrying polarisation in the South East. Some schools cannot appoint teachers because of the doubtful reputation of the school and the perception of the kind of pupils it serves (even when this reputation and perception are undeserved). Other schools, with excellent reputations, cannot recruit teachers because the local cost of housing is too high. As prices of desirable properties continue to rise, anecdotally there seems a real danger of these two groups of schools “meeting in the middle” – so that, in a cruel parody of Groucho Marx’s remark about gentlemen’s clubs, a newly qualified teacher would not want to work in any school that served an area where he or she could afford to live. Only a few schools – basically, those in expensive areas within an hour’s travelling time of a depressed area – are likely to find teacher recruitment straightforward.
4 Conclusion

This Report has demonstrated, we believe, that there is strong support from teachers for significant moderation of their workload, and that contractual changes are necessary to ensure that this moderation takes place. Whether addressed through limits to teacher contact time or guaranteed non-contact time for marking and preparation (or both; the two are complementary), teachers are looking for some way to set limits to the workloads they now face.

The introduction of non-contact time in primary schools – many of which have none at all at present – would alone be a major breakthrough.

However, it will also be clear that teachers do not regard contractual changes alone as sufficient. Telling teachers to work less hours, without suggesting how workload can be moderated to fit in these shorter hours, is meaningless. As conscientious professionals, teachers will merely continue working the hours they are at present, in order that they, their schools and their pupils are not compromised.

What teachers need, we have argued, is not only guidance on what their working hours should be but an indication of how what is expected of them can be delivered, reasonably, within these hours. This indication can only be given by a body or agency that takes oversight of, and responsibility for, all that teachers are expected to do and views this as a whole.

For teachers, this will require a significant change to the current position. In contrast to what was promised a few years ago, any suggestion that the rate of change of National Curriculum and other statutory requirements might be moderated has been completely lost, and new requirements seem to arrive weekly. At the lowest level, new Chief Examiners appear to teachers to swap “A” level set texts on whim, not seeming (to teachers) to care what the effect this has on their preparation load for the new academic year. (“This chief examiner doesn’t seem to like Shakespeare’s tragedies”, commented one English teacher, “and that means weekend after weekend of work for me and for many others like me. Does it really matter to him that much?”) At a more systemic level, there still seems no understanding whatsoever of the time that will be needed to carry out the latest set of guidelines or instructions, nor any idea of where the extra time is to come from. There is simply too much for teachers to do; and much that they are asked to do bears no relation, in their view, to the teaching of children.

So what overall messages stand out from our fieldwork in these twenty-eight schools? First, teachers wished that someone, somewhere had an overview of all the administrative, monitoring and assessment work they were now required to do to deliver the National Curriculum. Too many of those responsible for loading further work onto schools and teachers had only a piecemeal perspective, and could not see how their own loading contributed to the whole.

Secondly, they wanted time to prepare and deliver lessons to the standard that they knew they were capable of, while being able overall to reduce the current 1:1 overhead of marking and preparation compared to teaching. This will require specific and nationally endorsed
guidance on what monitoring, in particular, teachers can be expected to do – backed up, perhaps, by equally specific criticism from OFSTED when a school’s management sets out (by accident or design) to require more than this.

Lastly, many teachers were – even in the “best” schools we saw – fearful that despite their best intentions the strain of the job they now had to do would be too much for them. As colleagues go off sick, the load on those remaining increases, and may be enough to tip the balance. Perhaps some of the schools we saw were nearer collapse than we thought.

John Atkins
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Mike Nichol

April 2002
Annex 1

Schools within the sample

By agreement, the identities of the schools visited in the study were to be kept confidential. However the following brief anonymised details of schools visited will give some idea of the scope of the work.

5 - 7 school, North East
5 - 8 school, South East
5 - 11 school, Home Counties
5 - 11 school, Home Counties
5 - 11 school, London
5 - 11 school, London
5 - 11 school, London
5 - 11 school, London
5 - 11 school, Midlands
5 - 11 school, Midlands
5 - 11 school, North East
5 - 11 school, North West
5 - 11 school, South East
5 - 11 school, Wales
5 - 11 school, Wales
7 - 11 school, Home Counties
7 - 11 school, Home Counties
7 - 11 school, North West
10 - 14 school, Midlands
11 - 16 school, Midlands
11 - 16 school, North East
11 - 18 school, South East
11 - 18 school, South West
11 - 18 school, Wales
Special School, Home Counties
Special School, North West
Special School, North West
Special School, Wales
Annex 2

The survey questions

The following questions were used as a focus for the study.

1. How many hours per week do you currently spend teaching (excluding cover)? How many hours do you spend in marking, preparation, planning etc. related to this teaching? What ratio does this represent (i.e. x hours preparation for every hour teaching)?

2. Is your teaching load reasonable? Does it lead to a reasonable working week? Do you think that the number of hours class contact you have per week (including cover) should be limited in your contract? What would a reasonable hours per week limit be? How many “non-contact” hours would this give you?

3. At the moment, you are required to work 1265 hours per year, or around 32__ hours per week during term time. Does this relate in any way to what you do? Should you be given some guaranteed time for marking and preparation (etc.) within these 32__ hours? If so, how much would be reasonable, given your teaching load? Should there be guidance on the amount of marking and preparation teachers should be expected to do outside directed hours? What should the limit be?

4. Are you currently allowed off-site when you are not teaching? Do you think you should be?

How much administrative support do you receive from admin and clerical staff? (Quantify if possible.) What kind of support do you get, and what functions can it carry out for you (typing, photocopying, research etc)? Is the administrative support you receive sufficient? If not, how many hours (per teacher per week) do you think would be appropriate?