Teacher Workload Research

Executive Summary 2024

Authors:
Moira Hulme, Gary Beauchamp,
Jeff Wood and Carole Bignell

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RESEARCH AIM & QUESTIONS

This summary report presents the findings of independent research on teacher workload in Scotland. The full report is available as a separate document. The research was commissioned by the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the largest teacher trade union in Scotland, which represents over 80% of all teachers across nursery, primary and secondary education. The study fulfils a resolution adopted at the EIS Annual Congress in 2022 which called for research into the workload of teachers, the extra hours they work beyond their contractual hours because of their workload, and the main reasons for the failure to achieve a 35-hour working week for teachers.

The 35-hour working week for teachers in Scotland's schools should consist of 22.5 hours class contact time, plus 7.5 hours preparation and correction (SNCT, 2007). The remaining five hours are set aside for locally negotiated collegiate activities. It is intended that the individual and collective work of teachers should be capable of being undertaken within the 35-hour working week.

This research examines to what extent teachers are working above the contracted 35 hours, whether they are undertaking activities out with the stipulated range of duties for teachers, the key influences that shape teachers' time use, and the impact of this on the profession.

Following a competitive tendering process, a consortium from the University of the West of Scotland, Birmingham City University and Cardiff Metropolitan University was commissioned to undertake this study. An EIS Steering Group and two teacher panels advised the research team. The research was conducted between January and April 2024.

The following questions were addressed:
- What are the main activities that constitute teacher workload?
- What is the balance of this workload over the working week?
- What extra hours do teachers work beyond their contractual hours?
- Where do workload demands come from, out with class contact time?
- What are the main reasons for failure to achieve a 35-hour working week for teachers?

BACKGROUND

A review of policy developments and educational trends identified five contextual factors that influence the duration and components of teachers' working hours in Scotland.

Teacher and support staff numbers - Balancing teacher supply and a sustainable workload for teachers is challenging. In Scotland, the recruitment and retention of qualified teachers across sectors, regions and curriculum areas has been an area of policy interest for some time. Recruitment concerns recently emerged in initial teacher education secondary programmes where intake numbers have fallen from 2020 (Seith, 2024). After rising between 2016 and 2021, the overall number of teachers in 17 local authorities fell slightly between 2022 and 2023. The percentage of post-induction scheme teachers in permanent full-time employment fell in 2022-23 to its lowest level since 2012 (28.8%) (Scottish Government, 2023a). The Scottish National Party (SNP) 2021 Manifesto pledged to 'recruit at least 3,500

additional teachers and classroom assistants and reduce teachers' contact time by an hour and a half per week' (p.62). This unfulfilled pledge was incorporated in the Scottish Government Programme for Government 2021-22.

Professional capacity – Successive reports have identified the importance of providing sufficient time in the working week for professional learning. Time and opportunity to undertake agreed professional learning for career development was noted by the Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers (Scottish Government, 2019, p.6). Workload was cited in relation to concerns around moderation in the rapid review of National Qualifications (Priestley et al., 2020). The OECD (2021) Review of Curriculum for Excellence highlighted a need to streamline guidance and strengthen support for teachers with ring-fenced time for curriculum planning. The General Teaching Council for Scotland's (GTCS) submission to the Muir review of Scottish education called for 'a fundamental rethink of teaching commitments to consider the time and space needed for... teacher learning' (GTCS, 2021, p.11).

Diverse learner needs – Teachers need time and support to respond appropriately to an increasingly diverse range of learner needs, including but not limited to Additional Support Needs (ASN). Between 2010 and 2023, the percentage of pupils with an identified ASN[1] rose from 10% (69,587 individuals) to 37% of all pupils (259,036 individuals) (Scottish Government, 2024a). Over the same period, the number of ASN teachers in Scotland fell from 3,524 to 2,898 (Scottish Government, 2023b). In 2013, each ASN teacher was supporting 40 pupils, by 2023 this figure had risen to 89 pupils (Scottish Children's Services Coalition, 2024). While spending on additional support for learning (ASL) by local authorities peaked in 2022-23 at £926m, average spending per pupil on ASL by local authorities fell from £5,698 in 2012/13 to £3,764 in 2022/23, a 33.9% drop in spending per ASL-pupil (Scottish Parliament, 2024).[2]

Behaviour – Pupil conduct issues in class and at school divert time from teaching and learning. Violence and aggression towards teachers have increased significantly in the years following the pandemic (EIS, 2023a). The most recent Behaviour in Scottish Schools Research (BISSR) survey found teachers across sectors reported an increase in classroom disengagement behaviours, and low level and serious disruptive behaviours (Scottish Government, 2023b). A perceived decline in pupil behaviour is associated with deprivation, trauma, adverse childhood experiences, and unmet additional support needs. Thirty-eight percent of primary teachers and 48% of secondary teachers spent between one and three hours each week dealing with the same pupils who present challenging behaviour (Scottish Government, 2023b, p.160).

Unproductive workload – Non-teaching time needs to be well spent. Tackling unnecessary bureaucracy in teaching has been the focus of several reports (Scottish Government, 2013; Education Scotland, 2016) and a recurrent theme in discussions of the Teacher Panel, 2016-2023. The Education Governance review (Scottish Government 2017) noted that, 'Too much bureaucracy means that teachers and headteachers spend too much of their time on paperwork and not enough time leading their schools and focusing on learning and teaching' (p.16). Non-teaching time is often taken up with accountability-driven processes that reduce the time available for planning and preparation, marking and feedback for pupils.

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[1] Statistics on additional support needs include pupils in special schools and those in mainstream schools who are assessed or declared disabled, or have a Co-ordinated Support Plan (CSP), Individualised Education Programme (IEP), Child Plan or another type of support. Pupils may have more than one type of ASN.
[2] https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-26184

METHODOLOGY

To generate new insights into teacher workload in Scotland in 2024, a sequential mixed methods design was employed. The research design was informed by a review of international research on teacher workload (included in the main report). The main data sources are an online time use diary, generated using the QuestionPro online survey platform, with accompanying quantitative and qualitative survey questions, supplemented by semi-structured interviews. Pre-coded activities in the time use diary were generated in consultation with two volunteer teacher panels convened in January and February 2024. The iterative involvement of teacher panels in the design and peer review process reduced the risk of partial completion by respondents and validated the data collection instruments. The survey component included a validated perceived stress scale (Cohen et al., 1983), a job satisfaction scale (Mullis et al., 2020) and a teacher time poverty scale (Liu et al., 2023). A link to the time-use diary was distributed to all members of the EIS employed as teachers in schools in Scotland in March 2024. Teachers completed the workload diary for the full calendar week beginning 4th March 2024, including evenings and the weekend. The diary and survey questions were completed by 1,834 teachers employed across the 32 local authorities in Scotland. Overall, the majority of characteristics (including demographic and school characteristics) for teachers across roles responding to the survey were similar to the average for the overall population of teaching staff as described by the Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023a). In addition, 40 teachers employed by 26 local authorities participated in a remote interview (via online video call) of 45 minutes duration between 18th March and 29th April 2024. The research instruments and a detailed breakdown of teacher and school characteristics can be found in the main report.

KEY FINDINGS

Reported working hours in the target week indicate that teachers in Scotland are routinely working well beyond the 35-hour working week stipulated in the 2001 Teachers' Agreement, SEED, 2001). On average, the teachers who participated in the research reported working **46 hours** in the target week. This shows no improvement from the Teacher Working Time Research conducted by the University of Glasgow in 2005-06 that found teachers to be working 45 hours per week (Menter et al., 2006), and is an increase on the eight additional hours reported in the 2022-23 EIS member survey (EIS, 2023b). Two decades after the Teachers' Agreement, **teachers in Scotland continue to work well beyond their contracted hours and working hours are rising.**

The distribution of activities across the working week is also changing as teachers contend with additional challenges of personalised planning for more diverse learner needs, an increase in behavioural and attendance issues, and expanded pupil wellbeing responsibilities. The contraction of support across children's services extends and intensifies the work of teachers.

Within contracted hours
- Teachers who were primarily classroom-based reported spending around two-thirds (68%) of teaching time on learning interactions. Minor disruptions and significant behavioural interruptions occupied between 14.7% - 28.6% of all face-to-face teaching time for all roles in schools.
- Interviewees consistently reported greater use of teaching time to address low level and serious disruptive behaviour, and administrative follow-up activities outside

lessons to report incidents and communicate with parents/ carers/ colleagues/ external agencies.

- Planning and preparing lessons and marking and feedback were the core tasks that occupied most time for classroom-based teachers. These two activities accounted for 6 hours and 49 minutes, on average. In the target week, the mean number of hours spent outside class (within contractual hours) by main grade teachers on planning and preparation was 4 hours 15 minutes (4.25 hours, 41.8%), plus a further 2 hours 34 minutes (2.57 hours, 25.7%) on marking and providing feedback to pupils.
- Higher rates of pupil absence and intermittent attendance require additional preparation to maintain learning for pupils who are away from the classroom in other within-school provision, or at home.
- Addressing the needs of all learners (regardless of cultural background, gender, socioeconomic status, or additional support needs arising from disability and health, family circumstances, or social and emotional factors) is increasingly difficult.
- Teachers reported increased levels of additional support needs (ASN) from early years to senior classes in high school.
- Planning and preparation challenges were most acute among interviewees teaching composite classes, cross-phase teachers, teachers of technical subjects, and subjects with just one teacher.
- In addition, in the target week, on average, main grade teachers spent one hour communicating with parents/ carers/ colleagues/ external agencies, 36 minutes on behaviour referral, 25 minutes on pastoral work, and 42 minutes for out-of-class learning conversations.
- Across sectors and regions, main grade interviewees commented on the challenges of completing data entry for tracking, monitoring and reporting within their contracted hours, especially regarding standardised assessment.

Outside contracted hours
- On average, teachers reported spending **11.39 hours** in the week outside of contracted hours on work-related activity undertaken in the morning before work, into the evening and at home at the weekend.
- The three activities that consume by far the largest time commitment *outside contracted hours* (and totalling over five and a half hours) are **planning and preparing lessons** (2 hours and 15 minutes), **preparing resources** (1 hour and 50 minutes), and **marking and feedback for pupils** (one hour and 30 minutes). These core activities are consistently reported as the main drivers of workload that cannot be accomplished within contractual hours.
- On average, teachers who completed the time use diary spent almost **four** hours (3 hours and 55 minutes) on work-related activity **at the weekend**.
- Work beyond teachers' contracted hours was the strongest predictor of perceived stress irrespective of sector or role. Workload burden leaves teachers feeling stressed within all aspects of their lives.
- Results from the perceived stress scale show that the teachers working in urban settings, early career teachers, and teachers who had more time with face-to-face commitments reported higher levels of stress.
- There is a direct relationship between the level of work undertaken in evenings and weekend and reported job satisfaction. As teachers work longer hours outside of their contracted hours, they are increasingly likely to feel lower levels of job satisfaction.
- Time for elective professional learning was reduced to just 35 minutes during the week, on average, for main grade teachers. Many teachers reported being caught in

a continuous cycle of 'catching up' that constrained possibilities for deeper forms of reflection and strategic professional development.

- Interviewees' accounts suggest school policies vary regarding expectations that teachers will access work-related emails in evenings and weekends.
- Many teachers reported that extensive use of electronic platforms such as MS Teams, WhatsApp, and Google classroom could help to manage workload remotely but also increase working hours.
- Interviewees reported negative effects of extended working hours on family life, including reduced participation in social and leisure activities, less time spent with their own children, and increased reliance on partners to manage family responsibilities.
- Workload was a contributing factor influencing teachers' career decisions i.e., whether to seek promotion, move schools, move into education-related work, or exit the profession.

DRIVERS OF WORKLOAD

The key drivers of teacher workload reported in this study are:
- Multiple competing pressures on non-teaching time that mean that core activities - planning, preparation and marking - cannot be accomplished in contractual hours
- Increased pupil behaviour and attendance issues
- More diverse learner needs requiring personalised planning
- Increased and more complex Additional Support Needs
- Reduction in support for learning
- Insufficient funding to support increased job demands

A policy focus on excessive work time and occupational wellbeing in teaching is timely. This study provides little support for the effectiveness of workload reduction strategies to date. Working hours are rising. Increased staffing numbers and increased support - in terms of non-contact time and access to specialist expertise and development opportunities – will help to protect the quality of education in Scotland's schools and promote positive perceptions of teaching as an attractive and sustainable career choice.

A note on methods and findings
The working patterns presented are based on self-report and teachers' work per week can vary substantially over the academic year. Random repeated allocation of diary days was not possible within the timeframe for this research. The response rate to the survey is high (and the participant profile is consistent with the general teaching population in Scotland as recorded in the Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023a)), but some of the subgroups are small e.g. the proportion of returns from probationers, chartered teachers and lead teachers (See main report, Appendix 1). The instrument was co-designed with a focus on class-committed teachers and school leaders working patterns are less well represented. Teachers may respond to workload stressors differently. Further research is needed to interrogate time use data by individual and school-level characteristics.

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