Managing Workload and Well-being Research

A summary of the latest research from IMPACT Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching

How reducing teacher workload can improve student outcomes

At Charles Dickens Primary School, we have been working for five years to reduce teacher workload. We started with written marking and have subsequently addressed planning, displays, reporting to parents and writing assessment. Over this period, we have seen student outcomes improve in English and maths and, more recently, in foundation subjects. Teachers report to us that they have the freedom to focus on developing their practice and on actions that have a strong positive impact on the students in their classes. Charles Dickens retained its 'Outstanding' judgement following an inspection in September 2019, and the average combined reading, writing and maths outcomes over the last three years are more than 20 percentage points higher than national figures.

Our journey to reduce teacher workload started almost by accident. In 2015, teachers started a Journal Club, in which staff met on a termly basis to explore a piece of educational research. In spring 2016, we discussed the Education Endowment Foundation's *A Marked Improvement – a Review of the Evidence on Written Marking (*Elliott et al., 2016). One statement in particular struck a chord: 'Given… the huge amount of time currently invested in marking, it is essential to ensure that marking is as efficient and impactful as possible.' (p. 4)

Teachers overwhelmingly felt that written marking was taking a disproportionate amount of their time, without the corresponding effect on student outcomes. Their frustration was less about their workload per se and more about ensuring that this workload was purposeful.

The findings of *A Marked Improvement* were supported by the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group's *Eliminating Unnecessary Workload Around Marking* (2016). This report included some bold and resonant statements, in particular: 'Marking practice that does not have the desired impact on pupil outcomes is a time-wasting burden for teachers that has to stop.' (p. 3)

The following September, the National College for Teaching and Leadership invited bids from groups of schools to lead research projects into one of the three areas highlighted in the Workload Challenge. Following the clarion call from *A Marked Improvement* that 'There is an urgent need for more studies so that teachers have better information about the most effective marking approaches' (2016, p. 5), Charles Dickens submitted a proposal to work with other primary schools in Southwark to investigate the impact on teacher workload and student outcomes of completely removing distance written marking in English and mathematics.

The project schools replaced written marking with:

- self- and peer-assessment
- verbal feedback within the lesson
- conferencing after the lesson.

The project was funded from January to July 2017 and covered teacher release time for training and check-in sessions, a formal evaluation from UCL Institute of Education, and dissemination of the findings. Each school had two intervention and two control classes, though these were not randomised. We used the first half-term to train teachers in alternative feedback strategies and for them to teach their students to self- and peer-assess accurately and honestly. The intervention ran from spring term two to summer term one. Teacher workload was measured through entry and exit surveys; student outcomes were measured using entry and exit age-standardised tests (GL Assessment's Progress Tests in Maths) and through extensive writing moderation. The data analysis and project evaluation were conducted by UCL Institute of Education and published as *Reducing Teacher Workload: Southwark Teaching School Alliance Research Report* (Featherstone and Seleznyov, 2018). We invited parents to an information evening to explain the no-marking project, and their children's books were shared at parents' evening. At the end of the project, we shared the outcomes in a dissemination event. No concerns were raised by parents.

The key findings for our project were:

- Teacher workload was reduced by over six hours per week
- There was no impact on student outcomes: the progress of students in the intervention was not measurably different from that of those in the control group.

Four other groups of schools across England received funding to run projects exploring alternatives to written marking. The findings of all five groups were remarkably consistent, as seen in **Table 1**.

Project and focus	Impact
Southwark TSA (5 primary schools) Replaced written marking with a range of 'live' feedback approaches	Reduced workload No negative impact
Wigan Wows (15 primary schools) Replaced written marking with verbal feedback, marking codes, peer- and self-assessment	Reduced workload No negative impact
Aquinas Trust (3 primary, 2 secondary, 1 special school) Replaced written marking with verbal feedback	Reduced workload No negative impact
Cheshire Vale (3 secondary schools) Replaced written marking with a range of 'live' feedback approaches	Reduced workload No negative impact
Flying High (16 nursery and primary schools) Replaced written marking with a range of alternative feedback strategies	Reduced workload No negative impact

TABLE 1: FINDINGS FROM PROJECT SCHOOLS

The project evaluations are listed in the References section (Herbert et al., 2018; Kime, 2018; Protsiv and Welch, 2018; Richardson et al., 2018).

Since 2017, we have honed our approaches to feedback and rewritten our feedback policies to remove any requirement for written marking. With the increased focus on the quality of feedback and on the immediacy with which students receive feedback, we have seen student outcomes in writing and maths improve year on year.

One senior leader from a participating school commented, 'When it first came up, I thought it was the worst idea ever. Now I think it's brilliant.'

And what do teachers do with that additional time saved from marking? They plan meaningful responses to the students' work; they leave early to maintain their work–life balance; and they have more time and energy to spend on their professional growth.

Involvement with the project got us thinking more about teachers' workload. In the past two years, we have made further changes:

- introducing a commercial scheme of work in maths and home-grown, fully resourced schemes in science and foundation subjects
- replacing displays with working walls
- replacing detailed narrative reports to parents with simple reporting of attainment and engagement data across all subjects
- using comparative judgement (nomoremarking.com) for writing assessment.

The impact of this work is monitored through staff workload and wellbeing surveys and, in 2019, through a peer review, in which we asked senior leaders from other schools to evaluate our progress. This found that teachers' workload has reduced by about 10 hours per week. Data suggests that student outcomes have either remained high or improved.

Teachers' time is finite. If we want the very best for our students, we need to allow teachers to focus on those activities with the greatest effect on student outcomes. By reducing workload in areas with little evidence of impact, we can realign teachers' working lives with their moral purpose and improve both teacher wellbeing and student outcomes.

References
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Professionally Acceptable Workload: Learning to act differently towards effective change

JULIE GREER AND CAROLINE DALYMAY 2020

The Department for Education (DfE) has taken steps over recent years to emphasise the importance of addressing excessive teacher workload, in order to reduce the number of teachers leaving the profession and to encourage more entrants to teaching. Advice has been published for providers and practitioners, such as 'Addressing teacher workload in initial teacher education' (DfE, 2018a), 'Reducing workload: Supporting teachers in the early stages of their career' (DfE, 2019a) and the 'top tips' offered in 'Ways to reduce workload in your school(s)' (DfE, 2019b). Toolkits for reducing teacher workload have been published, with examples from small-scale research studies in twelve settings (DfE, 2019c). The guidance is aimed at encouraging institutional and cultural change, which is vital in developing a mentally healthy workforce whose members can engage all children and young people in learning.

However, if this is to become a reality, the workforce has to be central to its own reform; without significant shifts in perceptions of 'work' by all members of school communities, nothing can change. Although a great deal needs to be done to reduce the external pressures on schools that have impacted on teachers' workload for many years, a further aspect needs to be addressed by teachers, teacher educators and school leaders together within schools. This is because the culture of extreme workload in pursuit of perpetual improvement is embedded in a whole generation of teachers. It is almost impossible to think differently about teaching as a profession and about what it means to be an expert teacher. This article focuses on this particular challenge within the profession itself – to reform views of acceptable workload – whilst acknowledging that the external conditions that have produced the current situation need to be tackled.

Extreme workload as a proxy for excellence

Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) concept of *habitus*, we need to understand the ways in which teachers internalise the influences that inform how they operate as social beings. We argue that the unwritten rules of the school community have been seriously underestimated in the workload debate. Working excessive hours has become normalised within the culture of schools – it has become a tacit indicator of teachers who are acknowledged to be dedicated and expert professionals. Trainee and new teachers frequently observe more experienced colleagues managing extreme workloads with great professionalism and resignation. They learn about what is acceptable from them. This is a dilemma facing the profession. Long, unreasonable working hours are frequently modelled by school leaders and by experienced teachers who have gained respect and seniority. Extreme workload has come to be viewed as intrinsic to achieving and maintaining standards – for example, by the collection, management and communication of large quantities of data; by extensive teaching outside the school day; by disproportionate performance management; and by minimal time for meaningful professional learning away from classroom teaching, which has become viewed as 'guilty time', in a perverse reversal of ideas about being a 'professional' whose expertise needs to be nurtured (Ball, 2013).

Teachers' self-worth and beliefs about long working hours

Try to envisage the response in many staffrooms to a teacher who says, 'I don't find my workload unreasonable and I can usually manage everything without my work taking away from family time in the evenings and at weekends.' How many teachers would dare to speak this if it were true? How would the majority of other staff respond to such a statement? How many would honestly wonder whether the teacher was doing their job properly? Working very long hours has become a proxy for being good at the job. It is so much a part of professional identity that it is difficult to think of behaving differently, even whilst feeling deeply unhappy about the impact on personal life and mental wellbeing. It has become part of teachers' emotional investment in their role – part of their sense of worth and efficacy. It affects informal talk amongst staff and the ways in which subliminal messages are conveyed within schools, and to which trainees and new entrants are extremely sensitive – 'it's just the way it is in my school'. There seems to be no point in having deep discussions that start with 'but this is not making a fundamental difference to the experience of pupils in my classroom/school' or 'this is data production and management that does not impact on the quality of my teaching/the teaching in my school'. This is just as difficult for school leaders as it is for classroom teachers and mentors – and new entrants learn the talk. It is necessary for school communities to stop and consciously deliberate on this, to make the 'unspeakable' become discussable.

Frank talk needs to happen so that more teachers – including new entrants – come to believe that a teaching career is sustainable. This means understanding the complexity of teachers' feelings about their workload and their identities as excellent, committed professionals – but changing the ways in which we talk, think and act about workload is emotional work.

Emotional change

For effective and active learning to take place, at any age, there needs to be a level of intrinsic motivation and a questioning of assumptions that have become 'normal' as a basis for altering identities (Mezirow, 1990, 1997). To change practice and habits successfully, teachers at all stages in their career will need to learn anew – challenging the culturally acceptable practice that currently equates effective practice with 'hard work' or long hours. The school workload reduction toolkit (DfE, 2018b) promotes good practice, but it is still possible for a

school to work through the contents at senior level in the spirit of consultation, without class teachers feeling empowered to take part in any reform. It is important, therefore, to consider ways in which teachers can engage in their own decisions about a professionally acceptable workload. In order to reframe personal responsibility within the hierarchical systems of school management, it is important to situate discussions in the context of *emotional capital* (Cottingham, 2016, p. 452):

"Emotional capital is a tripartite concept composed of emotion-based knowledge, management skills, and capacities to feel that links self-processes and resources to group membership and social location."

In other words, in the context of schools and colleges, a teacher's emotional capital is dependent on the ability to understand their feelings, to use those feelings effectively within the workplace as a resource, and to communicate to others how those feelings have been useful. In order to employ emotional capital, it is likely that other forms of capital, such as social capital, will also be in place. The absence of emotional capital might be a teacher who just does as they are told, feels no sense of ownership of tasks, doesn't feel able to critique practice and doesn't feel a probability of success that they will be able to effect change within the organisation.

Any discussion of 'teacher workload' is dependent on the relationship between the person working and their emotional response to that work, alongside that teacher's understanding of colleagues' and parents'/carers' feelings and attitudes to that work and the policies and practices that relate to it, as decided by senior managers and governors. All this is balanced by how much the teacher feels that they have agency over this work. The potential for a deficit of emotional capital when people feel that they have no control over work demands also applies if people feel disempowered to make the changes needed to improve working conditions.

It feels important, therefore, to articulate any discussion of workload in vocabulary that emphasises the role of the individual, the framework of a team and the professional responsibility to the learner.

Working towards a professionally acceptable workload

The notion of a professionally acceptable workload perhaps offers a greater chance of gaining the cooperation of various stakeholders in making the changes that are needed in our educational organisations. Archer (2007) holds out hope that individual reflexivity can help to enable things to be done differently. This involves being able to talk deliberately about how to change behaviours. We suggest that a focus on emotional capital can make a valuable contribution to reflexive practices, within altered school discourses about how work is valued. What is *professionally acceptable* can be a focus of explicit and honest discussion by all stakeholders (Kossek and Lambert, 2004), whilst being a way of capturing the differentiation needed within workload decisions (e.g. by career stage and pay grade), although this does not take away from the clear need to bring wellbeing and workload into better alignment. The UCET companion paper upon which this article is based, available online, offers a number of discussion prompts for open talk amongst providers and schools.

The role of teacher educators

Given all this, what can teacher educators in particular do to encourage and promote professional, acceptable workload practices in trainees? The prompts below may provide a starting point.

- Make professionally acceptable trainee teacher workload an explicit item in ITE partnership agreements, with boundaries that have been discussed with all parties. This goes beyond stipulating teaching hours. It includes the total hours that it is calculated that the trainee should be spending on the training programme. Agree what is reasonable on a weekly basis.
- Agree partnership processes for trainee teachers to articulate where their workload becomes unreasonable, without fear of repercussions.
- Develop knowledge and understanding of individual trainees' circumstances – e.g. where childcare needs should be a prime consideration in allocating placements.
- Provide clear guidelines to support students with financial pressures.
- Make wellbeing and workload management a standing item in regular mentor meetings.
- Train mentors in understanding appropriate workload and how they model professionally acceptable workload management.
- Share a position more widely with education partners about the importance of equipping teachers, particularly in their early career, with adaptive expertise.

- Encourage reflexive practice – giving trainees the skills to take ownership of their pedagogical thinking and techniques for returning to their reflections and developing them further. This can be a powerful way to hold emotional capital in relation to your practice and workload.
- ITE programmes can develop new teachers to be able to articulate the 'non-negotiables' within workload issues and why these are so important.
- ITE programmes can prepare trainee teachers and school partners to approach workload and wellbeing as major features of induction for newly qualified teachers.
- Provide non-taxing ways to keep a dialogue during placements, e.g. reflective weekly journals through a few lines in an email, a vlog or a visual diary.
- Act as an advocate for the trainee where necessary, e.g. if a second placement is very different from the first placement and the trainee is finding different expectations difficult.
- Encourage discussions between trainees, and between teacher educators, to promote critique on workload practice, not criticism.
- Review the protocols for mentors and university tutors to liaise where there are concerns relating to management of workload.
- Make wellbeing and workload a standard focus of mentor discussion with the university tutors when they visit.

Creating an environment to support effective learning strategies for early career teachers

LISA VANN SEPTEMBER 2020

How do we encourage our early career teachers to engage purposefully with research and in at a time when they are busy establishing their craft in the classroom? How do we also build upon the research-engaged and evidence-informed practice demanded by initial teacher training (ITT)? These were key questions that have refined our early career teacher programme in recent years.

We know that we work in a national climate where teacher recruitment and retention is challenging, and seek to provide our early career teachers with the support and challenge that they need to thrive. Recruitment and retention is in crisis, with one in three teachers leaving within five years (Ward, 2019). In 2017, the House of Commons Education Committee ranked teacher retention second only to budgetary challenges, and the NFER (Worth, 2018) refer to teacher supply as 'bleak'. The Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2019) responses highlight that 72 per cent of educational professionals describe themselves as stressed. Influential organisations, including the EEF (2019), are seeking to support the provision of better training for NQTs, and the Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019a) recognises the need for a two-year training provision.

We know that getting the right professional support is key to retention. As Allen and Sims highlight (2018, p. 28), 'It turns out that teachers are not fleeing poor pupils but in fact are fleeing schools in which they do not receive the right professional support.' At Transform, we are determined to provide the best possible training provision for our early career teachers. We know that this makes a significant difference to retention. Our experience had already demonstrated that a two-year training programme gives a strong start to a teaching career, so we welcomed the ethos of the Early Career Framework (DFE, 2019a). We also recognise the need for focus on assessment, behaviour management, curriculum, pedagogy and professional behaviours, and since 2019 have framed our planning around these key areas.

Sustained professional learning

Our early career teachers engage in a two-year programme because we know that teaching is a career of lifelong learning and that one year is insufficient. In their extensive review of CPD provision, Cordingley et al. (2015) reported that effective CPD is typically sustained over a substantial period of time and has a rhythm of follow-up consolidation and support activities. Our programme applies a spiral design, resulting in key teaching and learning being revisited over the course of the two-year programme. Sessions run half-termly with follow-up reading and actions, supported by focused triad visits. We revisit key themes during the two years and regularly model retrieval and elaboration strategies to embed knowledge. Our aim is for our teachers to be confident classroom practitioners who are equipped to succeed in the challenging and exciting world of education.

A professional community

In their study 'Becoming a teacher', Hobson et al. (2009) report that there is a statistically significant association between enjoyment of teaching and teachers having positive relationships with colleagues, as well as early career teachers being able to develop a sense of autonomy and ownership. The Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019a) establishes that teachers enter the profession to combine 'a rich range of professional skills and knowledge, deep personal challenge and a sense of being part of a wider mission' (DfE, 2019b, p. 4). Our intention is to reflect these elements in our training and integrate this into our programme design. This ensures that our early career teachers experience shared purpose and collegiality from the earliest stage of their career and are aware of the wider community that they belong to. As part of this, our training launches with a two-day residential. This enables us to introduce our NQTs to their wider community, to teaching essentials and to coaching. It helps to establish a peer network from the outset, and learning in collaboration remains a thread throughout our programme.

Engaging with research and evidence

Research and evidence use are at the heart of our early career teacher development. Our approach to using and engaging with evidence and research is twofold: our first method is through our session delivery and our second method is through peer-led action research.

We draw upon a wide range of experts to model and share evidence-based practice at our sessions. This includes senior leaders from our schools and specialist leaders of education, who facilitate training sessions to build upon existing knowledge, refine practice and provide scope for discussion and reflection. This includes exploring curriculum, pedagogy, safeguarding and strategies to succeed.

Our face-to-face sessions have a familiar format. Subject experts share evidence-informed practice for our community of early career teachers to engage with and reflect on, with time to talk and plan. Peer discussion and collaborative action-planning help our teachers to identify next steps. Our teachers then apply this learning and share their reflections at future sessions. We ensure that each session enables our early career teachers to reflect upon professional behaviours. This continues to be a welcome aspect in feedback from our delegates. Often, our early career teachers are beginning to think about taking on leadership roles towards the end of the first two years, and time is allocated in our sessions for leadership and career coaching conversations. This is a conversation supported in schools and therefore supports our common language related to professional behaviours and leadership.

Throughout our sessions, we explicitly model our pedagogical approach for clarity and learning. Our focus on effective learning and use of cognitive science provide a framework for our face-to-face sessions, which we explicitly refer to. Sessions begin with a familiar format of retrieval tasks, elaboration strategies and dual coding to share and deepen knowledge, and are influenced by resources such as *Understanding How We Learn* (Weinstein and Sumeracki, 2019) and Rosenshine's 'Principles of instruction' (2012). By modelling key elements with deliberate and explicit reference, we believe that we are sharing effective teaching and learning models, a mantra of practising what we preach.

Early career teacher action research

We are also keen to allow our teachers to engage in their own research, and our second method of engaging with evidence and research is by creating an environment for early career teachers to embark upon purposeful action research. We group our early career teachers into triads and they create their own enquiry questions. This enquiry question acts as a focus for an investigation throughout the autumn and spring terms. Teachers visit each other's schools whilst they focus on their enquiry question. This structure enables our early career teachers to feel a sense of ownership for an area of teaching and learning that is relevant to them. This means that they are less likely to feel that this is CPD that is wasting their time, something that NQTs find a frustration and hindrance of CPD (Hobson et al., 2009). It enables them to take ownership of their professional development whilst building strong working relationships with peers and to experience working across different school communities. Teachers visit each school with their chosen line of enquiry as a focus, and explore how that translates to different school and classroom settings. This is subsequently shared with the wider early career community using an enquiry poster template. This helps to refine thinking and structure reflection and feedback. We also introduce this enquiry poster strategy to our teachers to prepare them for future CPD opportunities, when this approach is replicated and completed by an individual, rather than as a triad-based task. This

continuity helps the learning curve of teachers in their third year onwards to continue to grow rather than plateau in supportive environments (Allen and Sims, 2018).

This format feels positive. It helps us to capture the key learning and establish a defined purpose for the triad work. In previous years, we have used the triads as an opportunity to visit different schools to identify best practice. Teachers were sharing their learning in a TeachMeet format and the session was really positive, energising and supportive, but the learning was at risk of being lost once the session ended. Whilst this triad visit and feedback was always popular and useful, we were reminded of the variation of experiences of the novice and the expert (Didau, 2018). A structure to support the enquiry could guide the novice to be better able to explicitly draw out key learning. Our poster template structures the enquiry and manages workload at a busy time in a teaching career. We're keen to ensure legacy in our learning, so this structure helps us to capture learning with purpose. We are also keen for our early career teachers to engage in their own research to further develop their confidence and competence.

A further effect of this enquiry-based focus on a pedagogical question supports the shift from a feeling of being observed by others to a feeling of a collaborative study, similar to that of Japanese Lesson Study models (Hanford, 2015). Japanese Lesson Study focus is on teacher research followed by professional discussion and collaborative planning, which our triads also seek to achieve, and our triad design is influenced by this. In summary, teachers are able to concentrate on a key aspect of teaching and learning that is of interest to them and see how this translates to different classroom and school contexts.

Figure 1

The poster template (see **Figure** 1) records the enquiry question, and the triad explain their focus and approach, sharing a summary of research with references to support. This encourages engagement in research in a low-threat manner, linking to and building upon ITT, and provides an opportunity to engage in evidence-based practice. The triads apply the research to their own classroom experiences, with the benefit of visiting different school settings to gain a fresh perspective. Triads share their key learning points in relation to their enquiry question and this helps to capture learning from three different settings and to identify key themes. By working in a group of three, we minimise workload at a time of a steep learning curve (Allen and Sims, 2018), and maintain collaborative learning. The triad provide their recommendations and next steps. This element proves essential, as it is recognised that our early career teachers have developed expertise to share with their peers and wider school community. Individuals also generate personalised next steps for their own practice. Triad posters are shared with our schools and create a record of enquiry-based learning cohesive with peer-based

learning. As Allen and Sims note (2018, p. 16), 'Learning from peers is the single most important characteristic of schools that manage sustained growth in teacher expertise.'

We sought feedback on our approach from our early career teachers using an anonymised open-text end-of-session survey. Twenty-seven NQTs out of 45 attended this live session and all provided feedback. Typically, our attendance rates are much higher, however, during lockdown some NQTs watched the recorded session at a later date due to teaching commitments and were therefore unable to offer live feedback. Some examples of the questions and responses are outlined below.

Q1: What did you learn from your triad discussions?

- *The importance of recapping previous lessons and ways to do this.*
- *Strategies to help children use maths manipulatives appropriately and effectively.*
- *The influence of the wider community on children in school.*

Q2: What are your next steps following your triad discussions?

- *To continue to develop own CPD using recommended resources in addition to further training and research.*
- *Use Rosenshine's principles in my own practice.*
- *Always evaluate everything I'm doing. Is it effective? Is it having the effect I wanted it to? Am I wasting time and energy?*

In conclusion, when considering effective learning strategies for collaborative learning, we have found that there are key elements that support efficacy. In our face-to-face sessions, we find that an established, repeated format to model learning whilst applying explicit and deliberate teaching pedagogy aids our sessions. Expertise is shared and evidence-informed practice modelled, with particular reference to its application in the classroom. Furthermore, a clear, concise structure is provided for our early career teachers to engage in their own evidence-based enquiry, with the support of peer triads and a research-based poster template to structure enquiry and reflections. This creates legacy by capturing learning. Furthermore, it helps our newer practitioners to continue to engage in, critique and reflect upon purposeful research and evidence as they progress in their careers. Our next step is to undertake further studies in relation to the confidence and satisfaction levels of our early career teachers as they progress through the first few years. This will explore how our teachers continue to develop their curriculum and pedagogical expertise as they progress in leadership roles, as the introduction of the Early Career Framework promises to provide further support for our early career community.