

Secondary Workload Study

Why was this study done?

The Ministerial Taskforce on Secondary Teacher Remuneration, which reported in November 2003, recommended that a study be undertaken to consider how the work of a secondary teacher, and particularly a middle manager, could be better structured and resourced in order to encourage effective classroom teaching. The research was commissioned by the Ministry of Education.

Who did the research?

The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) was contracted to undertake this research, and undertook case studies and a comprehensive survey of secondary schools during 2004 to gather detailed information on secondary teacher workloads. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) also worked closely with ACER to support the research, particularly to manage the survey logistics and to ensure a New Zealand context for the study.

How was the research carried out?

Fieldwork was initially conducted in twenty schools, mainly through individual interviews with principals and a small selection of middle managers and teachers. This work assisted the preparation of the survey instruments.

The study consisted of a comprehensive survey of all secondary schools and detailed case studies of six schools.

Detailed case studies were written up for six schools. These schools were selected to provide a cross-section of school types and a range of workload issues.

Who took part in the research?

Survey forms were sent to all New Zealand secondary schools during late 2004. Surveys were sent to the principal, up to five teachers and up to four managers within each school. Responses were received from 1150 teachers and 936 managers and 235 school principals. Replies were received from 357 schools. There was an average of 6 responses from teachers and managers for each school. There was a good coverage of age, gender and experience amongst the respondents to the survey.

Other workload studies have been done in the past – how was this different?

This study differed from previous workload studies in that, as well as hours worked and kind of work performed, it also looked at how manageable people perceived their work to be, how satisfied they were with their work, how satisfied they were with the balance between work and home life, and the effect of workload on the capacity of teachers to perform their core work of teaching.

The report incorporates, and builds on, findings from previous studies on teacher workload.

What were the key findings?

The key findings of the study include:

- The research identified “moderate to severe” workload problems among teachers and managers in New Zealand secondary schools.
- The report noted that the actual number of hours worked by teachers and middle managers in secondary schools was high, but comparable with hours worked by teachers in other countries and by people in comparable professions.
- From both the survey and the case studies, the report noted that middle managers (mainly HODs) were clearly the group most affected by workload, largely related to their responsibilities in the areas of assessment, curriculum and performance review. Middle managers indicated that the difficulties experienced related less to the nature of the duties than to the lack of time and support to perform them.
- The research indicated that manageability of workload relates more to stress than to the number of actual hours worked. The report suggested that identified sources of stress need to be further investigated and addressed.
- A strong positive outcome of the findings was that middle managers and teachers were observed to be strongly motivated and committed to helping students achieve their academic and personal potential.
- Principals, middle managers and teachers see the most important factors in addressing workload and stress are: increased support to reduce workload/stress coming from the provision of additional [quality] staffing, and additional provision for time to do professional work outside of the classroom.

... so how hard do teachers work?

The total average hours per week worked by teachers without management responsibilities was 43 (based on teachers’ own estimates at interview) or 49 (based on figures from the survey). The total average hours per week worked by middle managers was 51 (based on middle managers’ own estimates at interview) or 59 (based on figures from the survey). This comprised scheduled classroom duties and management duties. The averages include weekends but not holiday periods.

Almost all teachers described their workload as ‘heavy’, but said it was manageable, most of the time. A significant number said that at certain ‘peak’ periods workload exceeded their capacity to manage it and that this negatively affected their teaching.

...what things create extra work or stress?

Different factors in different schools made a difference to teachers’ perceptions of workload. These were: levels of personal commitment to teaching and students; support for and management of student behaviour/pastoral care; adequacy of resources and support; leadership and shared vision; development of best practice through professional communities and professional learning; effective use of ICT;

amount of non-contact time; the number of support staff; compliance requirements, particularly paperwork associated with NCEA.

...how satisfied are teachers with their work?

Managers and teachers in schools showed very high levels of personal commitment to their work.

Teachers and senior managers, overall, were more satisfied with work-life balance than middle managers. Females were less satisfied with their workload and work-life balance than males.

New teachers, on average, found their work more manageable and were more satisfied with their workload and life-work balance than other teachers.

...what strategies had teachers and schools developed to manage workloads?

Teachers and schools have developed a range of strategies to facilitate managing of workloads, eg prioritising tasks, using support staff for non professional duties, minimising the number of meetings and using the meeting time more effectively, timetabling blocks of time for teachers to meet, and 'filtering' the demands of outside agencies.

A valuable strategy for managing teachers' workload was that of capacity building – providing teachers with the knowledge and skills they needed to work as competent professionals. More effective performance lightens workload and increases job satisfaction.

What were the suggestions for improvement?

The report suggested a range of support measures which could be developed, such as:

- building supportive and accountable professional cultures in schools
- providing managers and teachers with more time for collaborative planning and individual work outside the classroom
- improving professional development to increase efficiency as well as effectiveness, especially in areas such as planning and marking students' work
- improving policies and strategies for managing student behaviour, including the employment of specialist staff
- improving and increasing the use of ICT
- transferring clerical and administrative work to non-teaching support staff
- making more resources available through electronic means, especially to support the NCEA
- improving the quality of the work environment.

What might teachers and schools find useful in the research?

The report gave examples of good practice where schools were developing effective support structures and strategies for dealing with such things as managing student behaviour, or creating an ICT culture in the school, or creating a professional learning community, all of which were seen as factors in reducing workload.

The detailed case studies provide some pointers for managing time and workloads. For example, setting aside two hours a week for professional learning and shared

practice (one hour of school time and one hour of teacher time, ie 8.00 – 10.00 am); managing the number, length and focused purpose of meetings; employing support staff for administrative work; ‘filtering’ external demands; using IT effectively on a school-wide basis; creating more appropriate blocks of non-contact time in the school day.

Teachers’ perceptions of workload appeared to be more positive when they were working collaboratively in accordance with a shared vision under strong leadership. Schools are most effective when staff have shared goals and values, strive to achieve strong professional community and ensure access to on going professional learning.

What happens next?

Many of the recommendations align with the changes that are already incorporated into the Long Term Work Programme, arising from specific elements negotiated into the Secondary Teachers’ Collective Agreement. The Ministry has established joint working parties with PPTA and STA to address implementation of elements of the agreement such as enhanced career pathways (specifically the establishment of a pilot in 2006 for new positions in schools, known as Specialist Classroom Teacher), development of qualifications to recognise accomplished teachers, and sabbaticals for teachers (a limited pilot is scheduled for 2006).

This research will provide information to feed into future planning about staffing, support and change management.

What are some examples of professional support that teachers and schools can access currently?

There are a number of Government and Ministry initiatives and strategies currently in implementation which are related to improved effectiveness of teaching and could be linked to recommendations in the report. Eg

Strong leadership and shared vision was one factor that teachers recognised as alleviating workload/stress. The Ministry has established: The Principals’ Electronic Network (PEN) and Leadspace on Te Kete Ipurangi, on-line support, information and mentoring service; the First-Time Principals’ Induction Programme; the performance enhancement programme to mentor principals to lead their schools to develop more effective teaching practices; Principals Planning Development Centres (PDPC), an opportunity for principals to develop a personal professional development plan and on-going support to develop that plan.

Reduction/simplification of compliance issues. The Ministry is working through the Productive Partnerships initiative to reduce and simplify the compliance requirements for schools and streamline the communications channels, to reduce the compliance workloads of school management.

A new Ministry project, called Extending High Standards in Schools, is due to be implemented in 2006. Its main aim is to encourage schools to share good practice and seek organisational excellence.

Management of student behaviour. The establishment of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), specially trained teachers who support and work within school settings to meet the needs of students with moderate learning and/or behaviour difficulties.

Improving and increasing the use of ICT. The ICT strategy focuses on helping schools to extend their use of ICT to support new ways of teaching and learning, develop school ICT infrastructure, capability and programmes. This includes support for the laptops-for-teachers scheme.

As a result of the several sector reviews currently in progress, other forums are working on programmes which address provision of further support to teachers around NCEA and senior secondary curriculum and assessment.

On-going professional development and support is available through the contract the Ministry has with School Support Services in each region.

Where can teachers/schools go for assistance and support now?

Contact your regional School Support Services to discuss your professional development needs and requirements or to find out what courses are available through their programmes.

Leadspace and Principals' Electronic Network (PEN) <http://www.leadspace.govt.nz/>
From this site you can also access the Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC) and other helpful links to leadership information and learning.

The First-time Principals Programme <http://www.firstprincipals.ac.nz/>

Curriculum information and support <http://www.tki.org.nz/e/tki/>

ICT in schools

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=index&indexid=1024&indexparentid=1072>

The education portal with a range of information and links

<http://www.edcentre.govt.nz/education/sector.portal>