

Teacher Workload: An INTO Research Project

Background

The Teacher Workload Research Project arose from a 2018 Congress resolution calling for an independent study on the increase in teacher workload and its impact on teachers' health and working conditions. It called for the findings to inform and support actions by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) to protect members against increasing demands being placed on them, and for a deceleration of curricular change and initiative overload.

A working group drawn from INTO national committees along with the president and vice president oversaw the project. Retired members appointed to facilitate project workshops and other elements ensured an independent dimension. There were four phases:

- » workshops identifying workload and exploring potential solutions
- » preparation and dissemination of questionnaires based on emerging solutions
- » focus group discussions and preparation of recommendations
- » finalising conclusions and recommendations.

The survey, sent electronically to all primary and special schools, received a 36% response rate. Respondents had a range of teaching experience and held both administrative and teaching roles. DEIS schools and Gaelscoileanna were also represented.

Administration

Previous INTO research indicated that principals lack time to lead teaching and learning. In this research, they noted the benefits of weekly leadership and administration days with substitute cover. They agreed that their deputies should be released weekly from teaching duties to assist with school leadership and administration.



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This article reports on the INTO's Teacher Workload Research Project, an independent study on the increase in teacher workload and its impact on teachers' health and working conditions. It describes the scope and phases of the project, and it outlines the main findings, alongside suggestions for how teacher workload might best be reduced in practice.

Acknowledging the role of teaching principal as challenging, 93% agreed that schools with ten or more staff, and all schools with special classes, should have administrative principals, and that every school should have a qualified secretary paid by the Department of Education. Because much of the work of voluntary boards of management can fall to principals, 67% agreed that boards should be shared among schools.

Preparing school policies, often arising from national initiatives, is a major source of workload. To reduce this, 98% of principals agreed that all Department circulars should include policy templates. Other suggestions to reduce workload (from 914 respondents) included delegation and distributed leadership, greater administrative support, technology and online tools, networking and professional supports, and centralisation of summer works and capital projects.

Teaching and learning

Previous INTO research identified curriculum overload as a significant source of workload, but there was little consensus on solutions to address this. When asked why schools participated in initiatives which add to workload, principals cited benefits to pupils, publicity, competition with other schools, parents' expectations, and teachers' personal interests.

One of the greatest challenges is time for collaborative work, meetings, planning, and continuing professional development; 97% agreed that all schools should have a bank of substitute days to release teachers to participate in CPD. Principals suggested dedicated regular planning time with substitute cover. Some suggested longer working hours for which teachers should be paid. Employing specialist teachers for some subjects, freeing up class teachers, was a popular solution.

For the full report, see:

www.into.ie/media-centre/publications/other-publications/.