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Remodelling the Primary Teaching Workforce

What changes that have taken place in the primary schools we visited five years earlier, shortly before the introduction of the National Workforce Agreement? The biggest change to the teachers' working lives has come from the introduction of planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time. While broadly welcomed there was ambivalence about the role of teaching assistants (TAs) in covering teachers' time out of the classroom. Nor did additional non-contact time necessarily appear to reduce teachers' overall weekly workload, nor the amount of time spent during evenings and weekends. Why this should be so is discussed in the chapter.



What has changed in primary teaching?

We first surveyed primary schools in 2002, the year before the workload agreement came into operation. Five years later on our return visits to the same schools we wanted to discover how things might have changed. To what extent was remodelling:

- Relieving teachers of administrative tasks?
- Offering support through appointment of non-teaching staff?
- Lessening the workload?
- Creating more opportunities for professional development?
- Bringing about a better work-life balance?

Whenever possible we interviewed the same teachers. Of the five schools visited two were in inner city areas (one south and one north), one was rural and two

were located in suburban areas. Of these latter two schools, one was situated on the edge of large industrial city in the East Midlands and the other was near a market town in a large agricultural county. We typically interviewed the head teacher, the SENCO, six class teachers, some with management responsibilities and four or five teaching assistants. In all, therefore, we talked with around 60 individuals.

We began our interviews with teachers by asking them to describe a typical day, assessing how much time was spent on school work during the evenings and at weekends. Most teachers pointed out that this latter time varied enormously according to the period in the year. The bulk of medium-term planning, particularly for literacy, tended to be done during the holidays so there was less to do at the beginning of term. Report writing towards the end of term could take up four hours in an evening and ten hours at weekends. Given that most of the teachers were in school by 8.30 a.m. and didn't leave until around 5.30 p.m., and that they usually didn't work Friday evenings, this adds up to a 75-hour week at certain times of the year. For teachers with responsibilities such as drawing up policy documents or bidding for Health School Awards or Creative Partnerships this often required additional out-of-school time.

Typically teachers came in between 7.45 a.m. and 8.15 a.m. and spent the time before classes setting up for the day. A quick ten-minute break mid-morning, 20 minutes for lunch, before leaving home between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. meant that the typical working day lasted around nine hours (excluding lunch and morning breaks). When not teaching, apart from the allocated PPA time, teachers took clubs, either at lunchtime or after school. On average these teachers were involved in three such activities.

Compared with the 2002 survey we found an increase in the typical hours worked from just over 54 hours a week to 56 hours. This figure is based on the assumption that school work which might have been done on a Friday evening is carried over to the weekend. Most evening work is preparation or marking. Weekends are mainly reserved for short-term planning for the following week, catching up with records and other administrative chores.

Literacy planning takes a long time to do and also when you've got a class where there's so many...you know, where the range is great. It is planning for that differentiation, planning for the whole week. (Year 5 teacher)

With the little ones you tend to do practical things, like buy some boxes, or buy some seeds, or you know, but they have to be done.... With the little ones you are sort of preparing visual things and laminating and all that takes a bit of time... I would say five or six hours. (Reception class teacher)

Interestingly, these latter tasks are the kinds of activities included in the 24 administrative tasks that teachers are supposed to have ceased to do under the remodelling agreement.

Table 4.1 Average hours worked by primary teachers (1971–2006).
OME (2006), Teacher’s Workload Diary Survey, London: Office of Manpower & Economics

Activity	Hilsum & Cane (1971) [hours]	Campbell & Neill (1994) [hours]	Galton & MacBeath (2002) [hours]	OME (2006) [hours]
Teaching	18.8	22	24.2	16.8
Preparation/planning/marking	4.3	17.2	14.2	12.6
Administration/other	11.5	7.3	6.6	4.8
Dealing with parents/pupils	6.0	2.8	3.2	5.5
After-school work	0.7	1.1	1.2	6.6
Weekend work	3.3	3.2	5.4	3.8
Total	44.6	53.6	54.8	50.1

Nearly all the teachers interviewed claimed that they were now working longer than when we visited five years earlier. This contradicts the Office of Manpower and Economics (OME, 2006) calculations shown in Table 4.1. In examining the table the emphasis should be on the trends rather than the individual categories used in the OME surveys. This is because how time is categorised differs from survey to survey. Thus in the Hilsum and Cane (1971) study there was no separate category for meeting with parents other than formal parents evenings, so other meetings are subsumed within informal activities, including conversations with colleagues and pupils.

Whereas the OME (2006) figure for after-school work is higher than Campbell and Neill (1994) and Galton and MacBeath (2002), the latter two studies only specified after-school clubs with other forms of non-contact time in school after 3.30 p.m. included in the preparation, planning and marking category. Thus in Table 4.1, the ‘other’ category has been used to include all activities which could not be placed elsewhere. This accounts for the apparently anomalous finding that in Hilsum and Cane’s time teachers appeared overwhelmed by administrative tasks.

The figure for teaching in the OME survey, based on their finding that both primary and secondary teachers ‘spend just over a third of their time on teaching activities’, appears somewhat puzzling, even allowing for the impact of PPA time, as is the claim that secondary teachers do more teaching than primary colleagues.

A typical day’s timetable might see 9.00 a.m. till 9.30 a.m. taken up by registration and assembly. Lessons would then proceed until 12.30 p.m. with a 15-minute mid-morning break. An hour’s lunch break would mean school starting at 1.30 p.m. and finishing around 3.00 p.m. or 3.15 p.m. depending on whether there was another break in mid-afternoon. At a minimum, therefore, primary pupils are being taught for 21.25 hours per week and in many schools, where time for assemblies has been reduced to one per week, this could rise to 23 hours. Even allowing for a generous allocation of a whole afternoon PPA time

(as was the case in most of the schools visited in the 2007 case studies) this leaves 18.75 hours to be accounted for. Either this missing time 2 hours (18.75–16.8) is a statistical artefact of merging full- and part-time teaching loads or is being covered by specialist teachers for subjects such as music and ICT or is allocated to a teaching assistant.

Two things stand out in the table. First, the time given to parents and dealing with pupils' problems has increased, particularly since in the earlier surveys most of this time was taken up in dealing with pupils' problems. In our 2002 survey, for example, only 0.9 out of the 3.2 hours per week was taken up with parents. If we then add planning time to after-school hours (since in the earlier surveys much of after-school work was subsumed within the planning category) then workloads have increased since 2002. For the OME (2006) survey the combined figure is 16.7 hours (12.6 + 6.6 – 2.5 hours PPA time). Our corresponding figure is 15.4 hours (1.2 + 14.2 hours). To find out why these increases have occurred we need to look at what teachers told us in our recent school visits.

You can't do dinosaurs and castles – oh yes you can!

One of the main changes which have taken place since our first survey has been the attempt to develop a skill-based approach to the primary curriculum as part of the new primary strategy following on from the publication of *Excellence and enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools* (DfES, 2003a). Ironically, this approach of attempting to embed aspects of literacy and numeracy teaching into other subjects was the strategy adopted by the Interim Primary Committee, which was set up in 1988 to prepare for the creation of the National Curriculum. However, this idea was rejected by the then Secretary of State for Education who favoured 'a subject approach' to curriculum building and insisted that primary schools should provide pupils with a real knowledge of history 'rather than being taught dinosaurs for the second or third time' (Baker, 1993:193). Moreover, he rejected the idea of a committee of primary specialists to oversee the construction of Key Stages 1 and 2 and instead put a primary representative on the various Subject Committees dominated by secondary specialist (Galton, 1995:28). The inevitable result was to produce an overcrowded timetable, made worse by the statutory requirement under the Labour Government, requiring primary schools to devote two out of the 4.5 hours of each day's teaching to literacy and numeracy. Teachers in the 2002 survey resented this straitjacket as the following quotations illustrate:

The expectation of the amount that has to be covered, that needs to be really slimmed down. Doesn't it? It feels all the time you are rushing to deliver a huge curriculum that you've been told to deliver that doesn't end up balanced because of the pressure on literacy and numeracy, which come from the pressure for results so there're not getting sufficient time on the other subjects. [Deputy Head, 11 years' experience] (Galton and MacBeath, 2002:38)

You feel obliged to fit into a timetabled structure and it isn't always possible with practical subjects, like Art and Design Technology. You can't do that and part of

you feels guilty that you're not teaching how you used to teach. You feel quite stressed about it. [Teacher, 20 years' experience] (Galton and MacBeath, 2002:39)

The schools in our 2007 case study appeared to be emerging from under the dark cloud of this dutiful and mechanistic approach to the National Curriculum and QCA's (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority) prescriptions. In one of the schools visited, the head was endeavouring to challenge teachers who appeared too scared to depart from what they still saw, wrongly, as mandated subjects. He was attempting to liberate them to work from children's interests towards the NC rather than in the opposite direction. Long-serving staff, of which there were many, described a pendulum swing from the early thematic work they were used to, to adopt the straitjacket of the Key Stage Strategies and Literacy and Numeracy and now back again, or indeed forward, with more insight and structure to a interdisciplinary learner-centred approach. Teachers at this school ascribed the change both to visionary leadership and to some extent a general lightening of policy directive. Nonetheless the policy climate was still seen as too 'next step orientated', and the constant target orientation often meant that 'children switched off too quickly', particularly those with a short attention span who looked for continuous stimulation and reinforcement. Similar views were expressed in another of our schools:

I think the pressures have changed. Now there is the assessment targets, class targets. You assess naturally but it's all the paperwork associated with it. It's so time consuming. That has really changed in the last two or three years. [Key Stage 1 teacher]

I think some of the things that have come through... it's [marking] has got more not less. Although you would assess everybody... all teachers were assessing the whole time, it's now more into, well, it's got to be assessed on this type of thing, it's got to be assessed on that. There are registers, I mean like the Gifted and Talented. That's a great initiative but then we were having to put on children from every year group so it's not just the teacher getting the registers but we're collecting the registers and we have meetings with all these people to go through them. So there seems to be more and more. (Deputy Head and Year 6 teacher)

One Key Stage 2 teacher who was also Literacy co-ordinator summed up the prevailing sentiment.

I would want to change the constant assessment. I really do feel I'm constantly assessing and at the end of the day you don't see the child as a person – you see them as a target which is really, really sad.

A further problem concerns less experienced teachers who have, themselves, been taught under the National Curriculum and have then been trained to teach it. One Deputy Head teacher cited the example of putting a dinosaur on a desk in front of a student teacher who didn't know what to do with it. She cited him as a symbol of the age of compliance, so that teacher mentors now have to induct students and NQTs into a more child-centred culture. This again requires time.

Parents under pressure

In all the schools that we visited head teachers and staff commented on the difficulties with a small but significant group of parents. These parents, themselves under social pressure and often unable to deal with their own children's behaviour could be highly confrontational, sometimes resorting to violence in protecting their children's interests. While these parents were a minority, verbal threats and promises of 'going up to the civic' could shake a teacher's confidence and have an emotional ripple effect through the rest of the day.

Teachers described 'highly permissive' parents who admitted to indulging their children, often for the sake of peace or simply because they had run out alternative incentives or sanctions. They described incidents such as

- The mother who with great effort has now succeeded in getting her five-year-old to bed at 1 a.m. instead of 3 a.m.
- The seven-year-old who threw his PlayStation against the wall in a tantrum then had tantrums for a week until his mother bought him a new one.
- A six-year-old who told his teacher how to go about killing pimps and prostitutes after mastering *The Grand Theft Auto* in which the player has to kill as many people as possible.
- Parents who can't say no to their children demanding televisions, computers in their bedrooms, taking meals on their own and being isolated from the rest of the family.
- Parents who will do anything to shut their children up 'just to get some peace'. Young single parents on benefits or low income being particularly vulnerable to such pressure.

One teacher argued that some children miss out on normal child development because they spend much of their infancy in baby bouncers or strapped into cots, thus deprived of many hours of crawling and the attendant physiological, emotional and social development. Schools tried to compensate by providing equipment such as tunnels to crawl through and other motor-sensory experiences. Music, positive touching, yoga and peer massage were used in school as compensatory mechanisms as well as encouraging parents to work more closely with their children. Despite the current initiatives on healthy eating, in one inner city school half of the children came to school with packed lunches of chocolates and crisps, and in one case a child with seven chocolate bars as his lunch.

The prevalence and significance of such anecdotes is the contrast they present with teachers' accounts five years previously. Although, at that time, some teachers did refer to behavioural problems it was generally a reference to an insufficiently motivating curriculum for less able children. Revisiting the same schools, and often the same teachers, in 2007 there appeared to have been a significant and inimical impact on school life from a rapidly changing social scene. Motivating certain children, it was claimed, had become more difficult

because by the time they come to school many of these children had become expert in manipulating adults.

Faced with deteriorating standards of behaviour and a growing tendency for some parents to take their child's side, primary schools have become more like their secondary counterparts in instituting formal recording systems whereby incidents are logged and behaviour monitored.

We find everything we say we have to write down in a book... and although we always investigate every incident, you know, with some parents it's not enough. And so they will come in, you know, because the child will go home and say something's happened and, you know, children are children so how they say things isn't how it always actually happened so it's always investigated. Everything is written down, whether it's at lunchtime, mid-day or after school but you will still get some parents coming in demanding more. (Deputy Head teacher)

SENCOs (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators), in particular, have seen their workload increase. In addition to increasing time given to parents (two hours with one parent on the day of the interview) 'an awful lot of time is spent resolving behavioural issues' in discussion with other professionals.

Every other week I'll have meetings with behaviour support workers. We have triage meetings with two other SENCOs in the vicinity. The other agencies I'm involved in with the educational psychologist, half-term planning meetings and then meetings to do with any specific children. I'll have various meetings with various health professionals, the ones last week were with incontinence nurses. We've been trying to get social workers involved but it's not always easy, so we struggle with that a little bit.

Not all schools experienced the same level of difficulty. In one school with a diverse ethnic mix and an above average proportion of statemented children, and over 50 per cent of pupils in receipt of free school meals, behaviour was not an issue. This, it was claimed, was because of the generous staffing ratio (80 staff for 484 pupils) plus an active parents' support group which helped to ameliorate the kinds of problems described above. The price to be paid for this was time spent in meetings with parents and in training the large number of TAs (35 out of the 80 staff) some of whom provided one-to-one support for pupils with the most complex learning needs.

The PPA revolution

The most constant theme running through all the teacher interviews was the liberation provided by PPA time, described as time for reflection, renewal and for planning. For teaching deputies and SENCOs with other responsibilities it was often used to as a time to catch up on urgent or outstanding tasks (completing a bid or following up on a child's case, for example). In most of the schools the arrangement consisted of having one afternoon during the week free of teaching commitments. Teachers were free either to stay in school or to work at home so

that they could, should they wish, leave at noon. Most tend to stay in school to get access to resources, particularly web surfing where teachers often get ideas for lesson planning. It was also used for joint planning with colleagues teaching the same year group although there could be problems due to lack of suitable spaces to work.

There have been some issues about working in school. We have been using the Deputy Head's room. I used to do it in the staff room but you have staff coming in and out and the odd child coming in. (Key Stage 1 teacher)

The main benefits of PPA time appear to come from teachers feeling valued and of having a greater sense of ownership over how and where they work.

I go home [during PPA time] and it's absolutely terrific. I work on my own computer at home and I get far more done than if I was at school where you have children knocking on the door. (Key Stage 2 teacher)

However, in all but one school visited teachers said that having PPA time had not reduced the workload, although it had relieved the pressure by providing a period of concentrated time when something that needed doing urgently could be tackled. There appeared to be several reasons for this. First, the 'feel good' factor led some head teachers to develop new initiatives, designed to improve the curriculum or foster better relationships with the local community. For example, the head of the school with an above average number of children with special needs and diversity of ethnic backgrounds had previously allowed teachers planning time so that PPA had simply formalised an existing situation. As new cross-curricular activities had been introduced, in part due to the head's enthusiasm for SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning), in part due to a major initiative designed to get 'reluctant' parents more involved in the school, teachers said the PPA time had just 'filled up'.

Similar sentiments were expressed in another school where joint planning was the norm and a number of new initiatives had been introduced.

When it first started it [PPA time] was absolutely wonderful and last year when I didn't have planning meetings I was able to get a lot done. But now most of my time is taken up by planning meetings. (Year 3 teacher and member of SMT)

PPA time is being squeezed because we are having much more put upon us and although it looks fantastic and it is fantastic... we are doing as much as we did before because we have more things to do, especially making resources for the new phonics programme. (Key Stage 1 teacher)

A further reason for any lack of reduction in workload was down to teachers themselves putting back into the day those things which they valued as part of a good 'all round' primary education. In our 2002 survey these had been cut out on account of the pressures of accountability and testing. While PPA bought time it was paid back with interest as teachers were now investing more time in

events such as concerts and plays, and making more frequent outside visits. All required additional preparation time.

As PPA time takes place during lessons it means that planning is no longer done with the TAs present so that alternative times to share out the work need to be arranged. In general, PPA appeared to work better in schools with two form entry. Teachers working on their own in school were often 'fair game' when a crisis arose.

I try to plan my PPA time but it's a bit of a struggle sometimes. If you end up at school you end up chatting to people and then you get roped in to doing something else, not intentionally or perhaps somebody been naughty in your class and whoever's in can't move them. (Year 2 teacher)

Talking to other colleagues from other schools I think where it's a bigger school and there are parallel forms you've no alternative...but because you're a single class you've no shared time. (Year 6 teacher)

Much therefore depend on school leadership. In the school where teachers said workloads had decreased and that they often had left school by 4, the camaraderie and collegiality in the school had noticeably improved, a function of the support and mentoring which teachers get from colleagues. A pairing scheme had been instituted whereby more experienced teachers worked with those less experienced. The new head had drastically cut down on documentation and lightened the administrative burden on staff by taking on extra tasks within the senior management team.

It's still time consuming: It goes with the job

Undoubtedly, the most significant change since our previous survey has been the increase in the use of teaching assistants, partly as a result of the greater attention given to inclusion policies and partly as a way of coping with PPA time. In the 2002 survey most teachers strongly resisted the idea that classes should be taken over by non-qualified teaching staff.

They talk about having a classroom assistant relieving you and having non-contact time. But then I see myself as a professional and I'm thinking how can a classroom assistant be left with a whole class? I don't see it's going to work. I've done the planning for this and I know what needs to be delivered. And I'd have to find time to talk to that classroom assistant to deliver that class. I wouldn't feel as if I'm in control somehow. [Teacher, 20 years' experience] (Galton and MacBeath, 2002:55)

Now most teachers were still unhappy at the idea of teaching assistants taking over their class, while others were concerned about the use of TAs as cheap labour.

PPA time benefits me but it doesn't benefit the children. When there are specialists like the Italian teacher or the drumming lesson, that's OK but we leave easy work

for children to do when TAs are taking the class. (Key Stage 2 teacher: 8 years' experience)

Although PPA time is good I think they need to put more money in it so we can cover PPA time with teachers. I mean that's not getting at the HLTAs because they do a very good job. (Deputy Head and Key Stage 2 teacher)

In all schools PPA time was covered by the use of a mixture of senior management and HLTAs (Higher Level Teaching Assistants). Generally, the top end of Key Stage 2, particularly the SAT year was protected and taken by other teachers, as one head teacher explained:

Well we've got three HLTAs. So in Foundation Stage, Year 1 and Year 2 it's been covered by HLTAs. In Year 3 depending on the cohort it's yes and no. It depends. Depends on the cohort. Year 4 go swimming so a TA has trained up and we send the TA, two TAs plus parent helpers and that works well. In Year 5 we've a part time teacher and we've paid her extra and in Year 6 I do it. So you can say broadly teachers in at Key Stage 2 and HLTAs lower down. (Head teacher, one form entry school)

Often head teachers were in no position to fix budgets until the very last moment because funding can vary from year to year depending on the size of the intake cohort and its composition. As the head quoted above explained:

It's a huge thing getting all these teachers out for half a day because we haven't had funding just to put a teacher in and it's depending on the cohort and the making up of the cohort. I can't just say you're a HLTA and that's your contract. And the workload for the bursar is absolutely phenomenal because she's filling in time sheets and taking them off this rate and putting them on that rate. We can't just issue a contract because it changes. It keeps changing. (Head teacher, one form entry school)

Reading between the lines there is a sense of head teachers having to do the best they can with limited resources and of teachers, while unhappy with these arrangements, being prepared to live with them because of the benefits accruing from PPA time. Teaching assistants are mostly valued for the help they can provide with small group teaching and in coping with particular children, although the consequences of this approach for SEN pupils themselves can be problematic. When TA time is concentrated on supporting children with special needs their capacity to take over many of the 24 clerical tasks is limited so teachers still find themselves congregating around the photocopiers at 8.50 a.m. or at the end of the school day. Other teachers still took the time to put up their own displays.

Overall, there appeared to be less anger and disillusion among the primary teachers than we found back in 2002. Nobody now talked about 'getting out of teaching' although some with over 20 years' experience admitted to looking forward to retirement. The improved salary structure, PPA time and the consequent increase in the availability of support staff appeared to have given teachers a greater sense of confidence in their ability to cope. Most appeared

to work the same or longer hours, with little reduction of time spent in the evening or at weekends. All, however, complained about the excessive paper work (particularly that associated with target setting) and having to cope with a continuing succession of new policy initiatives. Now, however, the prevailing spirit appears to be one resignation at these circumstances and an acceptance that the job of teaching will never return to a time when it was possible to chat informally with colleagues and where 'I would have gone off at a tangent ... and talked about other things and they [pupils] would have drawn on their experiences' (Galton and MacBeath, 2002:40). Perhaps these sentiments are best summed up by one Year 6 teacher with ten years' experience.

There are times when it's very frustrating, but then when you think. I can think there's a lot of us who have taught practically all the time and who can't think of anything else that you would do. It's either in one form, primary or adults you know, but that's... [pause] teaching you know.

I can't see it being less. I think with the new strategy when it's more speaking and listening we may find that there's not much of a reduction. But for Year 6 you find some of it is quite... well still time consuming. But that's what you expect and you know that goes with the job.



Questions for discussion

Is there now a generational gap between younger primary teachers and their more experienced colleagues? Do they share the same concerns, have the same priorities and adopt the same attitudes to recent reforms? What are the implications of any differences for future professional development?

Why do you think so many of the teachers interviewed still carried out many of the clerical tasks (for example, photocopying) which under the agreement were supposed to be done by non-teaching staff?

Is it legitimate for non-qualified staff to take charge of a class?