

# **Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources**

**Report of the Independent Teacher  
Workload Review Group**

**March 2016**

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## Foreword from Chair, Kathryn Greenhalgh



Teachers are hugely committed professionals who work hard to put the needs of their pupils first. Their role is very rewarding but demanding and teachers want to spend their time on the things that will make the biggest difference to pupils' learning and progress. This is why the Workload Challenge was so important to me and the colleagues who made up the Planning and Resources Review Group.

It was a privilege to Chair this group and I was overwhelmingly impressed with the commitment and expertise from the members of the group. They are all passionate about education and stopping bureaucracy from standing in the way of progress.

We shared ideas, sought out the best practice in the profession, and looked at evidence to inform our recommendations. We considered planning for lessons and the great 'lesson plans v lesson planning' debate. We looked at lessons being viewed as a singular entity against themes or sequences of lessons. We heard from schools which created collaborative time for their teachers to plan together. We looked at schools which regularly use text books and teacher guides to support published schemes of work and other 'off the shelf' resources to investigate if these save time whilst maintaining quality of provision.

Current education policy is supporting far more autonomy and freedom, with schools being invited to lead the system. This gives leaders and teachers far more control over their curriculum and how they teach. It is an ideal time to consider collaborative work, both within schools and across partnerships. This demands a culture where teachers are prepared to share their best ideas and learn from one another.

I hope the reports and their recommendations resonate with the teaching profession and they will be used to give school leaders and teachers the confidence to make strategic decisions about what needs to stop and what needs to be done differently.

Teachers should not be spending their time on bureaucracy that does not add value. Teachers' time should be protected and used to make a difference.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'K Greenhalgh', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**Kathryn Greenhalgh**  
**Senior Director of Mathematics, Outwood Grange Academies Trust**

## **Eliminating unnecessary workload around planning and teaching resources**

As the workload challenge showed, all parts of the education system have a role to play in reducing the unnecessary tasks that take teachers and school leaders away from their core task: improving outcomes for children. There is no single reason behind excessive workload. Government must always introduce policies with thought and planning. The accountability system must encourage good practice rather than stimulate fads. School leaders must have the confidence to reject decisions that increase burdens for their staff for little dividend. Teachers themselves must be more active in using evidence to determine what works in the classroom. Two things are clear. Nobody intentionally sets out to create unnecessary workload, and everybody involved in education – from Government ministers to classroom teachers – has a role to play in reducing burdens. This report looks specifically at issues around planning and resources, explaining what the problem is, how it has arisen, and how it can be addressed. It offers a way to make a positive difference.

## Summary

1. Teachers spend an undue amount of time planning and resourcing lessons, and there are clear measures that should be taken by Government, Ofsted, schools, and teachers to lessen this burden.
2. Planning is critical and underpins effective teaching, playing an important role in shaping students' understanding and progression. It is the area of work where teachers can bring their passion for a subject and their desire to make a difference together.
3. There is a key distinction between the daily lesson plan and lesson planning. Too often, 'planning' refers to the production of daily written lesson plans which function as proxy evidence for an accountability 'paper trail' rather than the process of effective planning for pupil progress and attainment.
4. Creating detailed plans can become a 'box-ticking' exercise and create unnecessary workload for teachers, taking time away from the real business of planning, whilst offering 'false comfort' of purpose. These burdensome and unhelpful practices have arisen due to the real and perceived demands made by Government and Ofsted, and how school leaders and teachers have reacted to them.
5. School leaders should evaluate how they view planning in their school. All leaders have a key role in ensuring the availability of fully-resourced collaboratively developed schemes of work. Once these are in place, and individual teachers understand the 'what' and 'why' of the curriculum, they can be freed to teach in a way that best suits their professional judgement and experience. Access to good quality schemes of work should reduce workload rather than create it.
6. This can only happen if Government and its agencies commit to sufficient lead-in times for changes for which the sector will have to undertake significant planning to implement. This includes releasing relevant materials in good time.
7. High quality resources, including textbooks, can support teaching, reduce workload by teachers not having to 'reinvent the wheel', and ensure high expectations of the content of lessons and conceptual knowledge.
8. We recognised that there are cultural issues at play which should be challenged. We heard that much time is spent searching for 'silver bullet' resources, and this can be seen as a proxy for the development of effective sequences of lessons. This time could be more effectively spent in collaborative planning, and engaging with a professional body of knowledge and quality-assured resources that can be shaped to specific classroom contexts. This time needs to be valued by school leaders.

## What is the problem?

9. Detailed lesson and weekly planning were identified by 38% of the respondents to the Workload Challenge as adding an unnecessary burden to general workload. The analysis of responses drew out issues such as requirements around the level of detail in plans they submitted, having to produce annotated seating plans for each lesson and justifying decisions for these, having to change and revisit plans during the course of the week as lessons developed, and having tight deadlines for submitting weekly plans.

10. As with the other two review groups considering marking and data management, we considered the cost benefit in terms of teacher time and the potential for positive impact on pupil progress. Effective planning is the key to effective teaching but it is the unnecessary nature of the work around lesson plans that the group worked to address.

## Principles for planning

11. Five principles are set out below that we believe should be used to test practice and expectations in schools. These are motivated by a desire to ensure that planning is productive and that workload for teachers is manageable.

### Planning versus Lesson Plans

*a. Planning a sequence of lessons is more important than writing individual lesson plans*

12. Planning is essential for good teaching but, generally speaking, too much time is spent on detailed, individual lesson plans. Lesson planning is a thinking process, at the heart of teaching, and whilst individual lesson plans can contribute to this process, they can be a proxy for teaching: detailed daily or weekly plans should not be a routine expectation.

13. An end to this expectation does not mean an end to planning, but that less emphasis should be given to the administrative burden of individual plans at the expense of collaboratively produced schemes of work. We suggest that the weight given to individual lesson plans to evidence both planning and teaching should be reviewed and reduced. Burnt-out teachers are not best for pupils.

14. Where written lesson plans are deemed appropriate, their purpose and audience should be made very clear: the fundamental purpose of planning is to support effective teaching in the classroom, not to satisfy external audiences. Plans cannot show what actually happened in the classroom, nor the outcomes or progress made. They can provide a useful tool for professional discussion – for example between a teacher and a subject head or head of phase – to help understand and explain teaching decisions but should not be seen as an end in themselves.

15. There should be greater flexibility to accommodate different subject demands and needs, as well as the specific demands of primary phases. Subject and phase leaders

should decide and use the best planning tools to suit the particular demands of the subject or age group, rather than necessarily following a whole school generic tool. Individual teachers should be able to choose the best format for their working plans to suit their level of confidence, experience and preference, agreeing the rationale for this choice with the subject or phase lead. In this way not only can the subject do the talking, but it can allow the teacher to reconnect with their love of teaching.

16. Senior leaders should consider the cost benefit of creating larger blocks of time for this practice to make the planning activity as productive as possible and reduce the amount of time spent by individual teachers on individual planning.

*b. Fully resourced schemes of work should be in place for all teachers to use each term*

17. We recognise that pupils make progress by building content and conceptual knowledge over time. Doug Lemov, for example, refers to a ‘double planning’ method whereby objectives, resources and feedback are intertwined in a series of lessons’.<sup>1</sup> Planning should therefore identify what needs to be taught across a sequence of lessons, and avoid trying to fit teaching neatly into 60-minute chunks.

18. Senior and middle leaders – both subject and age range – should ensure that a fully resourced scheme of work is in place for all teachers at least for the start of each term involving the curriculum team in the development as part of regular professional development. This should be a default expectation, and where it is not met – for example, when a new unit of work is being developed over the course of a term – it should be made clear who will be planning and resourcing the lessons, what time they will have available to do so, and how this will be made available to all staff in a timely fashion.

19. Once schemes are in place, and individual teachers understand the ‘what’ and ‘why’ of the curriculum, they can be freed to teach it in a way that best suits their professional judgement and experience.

## **Plans as Proxies**

*c. Planning should not be done simply to please outside organisations*

20. The lesson plan acting as a proxy seems to be the key driver of unnecessary workload as the requirement to produce detailed lessons plans is often linked to evidence gathering rather than teaching. This includes meeting standards to satisfy ITT requirements; as evidence for appraisal and performance-related pay; and as proxies for ‘good’ teaching to submit during Ofsted inspections.

21. The plans themselves become the required end product, to be scrutinised and assessed, rather than reviewing the progress and outcomes for pupils that effective planning should have as its focus. They become proxies for effective teaching and, like

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<sup>1</sup> Lemov D (2015) Teach Like A Champion, pages 143-152.

inefficient forms of marking, provide physical evidence which offers 'false comfort'. They are evidence, but not necessarily of the outcomes required: is the teaching having an impact on pupils' progress?

22. This is not to say that an occasional or 'sample' detailed lesson plan is not a useful way to frame professional conversations about the choices a teacher makes in planning lessons, but it should not be an end in itself or routinely required.

23. Many schools clearly still try to 'gold-plate' their evidence of effective planning at inspection by making available huge folders of detailed lesson plans teachers have produced. Ofsted, however, has been very clear in refuting this in the clarification statements included in the [School Inspection Handbook](#) (2015):

- Ofsted **does not** require schools to provide individual lesson plans to inspectors.
- Equally, Ofsted **does not** require schools to provide previous lesson plans.

24. The arguments to continue with detailed lesson plans need therefore to be made on a pedagogical basis. We hope that leaders will feel empowered to challenge inspection reports which comment on lesson plans but we realise that it will take time for schools to feel secure that inspections will be true to the framework and to trust again in their professional judgement.

*d. Planning should take place in purposeful and well defined blocks of time*

25. Rather than requiring teachers to produce detailed, written lesson plans routinely, school leadership teams should be reviewing the effectiveness of how time set aside for planning is allocated. If planning is to be effective, schools should look to identify blocks of time to allow for proper collaborative planning, which offers excellent opportunities for professional development. Government and its agencies should support this by giving proper notice of changes for which the sector will have to undertake significant planning to implement, and produce any relevant resources in good time for teachers and school leaders to take account of them. In the case of ITT providers, we have seen evidence of excessively detailed plans being required as a matter of routine. Without proper context, this is not sustainable and does not promote the image of teachers as trusted autonomous professionals. There are clearly good reasons for requiring trainees to demonstrate their planning in a way that would not be appropriate for more experienced teachers. ITT providers should therefore concentrate on the purpose of planning, how to plan for the specific conceptual demands of a subject over time and how to identify the best resources to use.



## Resources for Professionals

### *e. Effective planning makes use of high quality resources*

26. High quality resources support good teaching but too much time is spent trawling for resources. Planning should start from the curriculum to be taught not the activities – what is being taught today, not ‘what are we doing today’ – and high quality resources can aid this. This is not to say that high quality resources cannot be developed by groups of teachers to support schemes of work, but the cost/benefit of continually searching or producing materials should be a critical consideration.

27. If the benefits are not apparent in pupil outcomes then this amounts to unnecessary workload. As John Hattie remarks, ‘there are a million resources available on the internet and creating more seems among the successful wastes of time in which teachers love to engage’<sup>2</sup>.

28. Instead, we believe there is an argument for schools to place more emphasis on quality assured resources, including textbooks, which often include digital supplementary resources, student books or teacher guides, reducing the time teachers spend on searching for ad hoc resources, allowing them to focus on the intellectual exercise of planning sequences of lessons.

29. We also feel strongly that any resource will only be truly effective when it is supported by high quality training and professional development. Having a shared and secure understanding of what effective teaching and pupil understanding looks like to inform planning is essential, as are collaborative planning approaches. Access to effective plans and materials for new entrants to the profession will support their development and allow them to concentrate on teaching.

30. Planning together needs to be accompanied by regular and professional discussion which focuses on the outcomes for pupils; thinking through the teaching of a subject, and the resources to support this: such approaches will also help develop a culture of effective professional development. School leaders should place great value on collaborative curriculum planning which is where teacher professionalism and creativity can be exercised.

31. There seems to be an underlying mistrust of textbooks, related to notions of professionalism, which assume it is more professional to trust a random resource, downloaded from the internet after many hours of searching, rather than a carefully curated, fully researched textbook. As Tim Oates has suggested, ‘high quality textbooks

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<sup>2</sup> Hattie J (2012) ‘Visible Learning for Teachers, Maximising Impact on Learning, page 64.

are not antithetical to high quality pedagogy – they are supportive of sensitive and effective approaches to high attainment, high equity and high enjoyment of learning’<sup>3</sup>.

32. International evidence points to a cultural bias against the use of textbooks and other externally produced and quality-assured resources in schools in England. We believe that this bias is adding to the unnecessary workload of teachers and suggest that cultural shifts are necessary; to treat resources as the tools they are and adopt a ‘mixed economy’ approach. The key matter of how to teach still has to be addressed: resources are like a recipe – a useful base but the flair of the chef is still needed.

33. It is clear, though, that issues of cost and quality have imposed limitations on the supply of textbooks in England. In response to criticisms of the market, The Publishers Association and BESA have done much in recent years to ensure higher quality at competitive prices, including working with teachers to produce [guidance for teaching resources](#). We think this is important work with the potential to improve issues of workload and teaching.

## The Challenge

34. If the curriculum is the central driving force of teaching, then time spent planning should not be wasted time. Lesson plans should be given the proportionate status they merit, and no more, to lessen teacher workload. By working together, drawing on available evidence about ‘what works’, teachers can increase their joint knowledge of a subject and of the best way to teach it.

35. As John Hattie argues, ‘planning can be done in many ways, but the most powerful is when teachers work together to develop plans, develop common understandings of what is worth teaching, collaborate on understanding their beliefs of challenge and progress, and work together to evaluate the impact of their planning on student outcome’<sup>4</sup>.

**Look at examples of school practice and how some schools have addressed the challenge of reducing teacher workload in planning and resourcing at**

<https://teaching.blog.gov.uk>

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<sup>3</sup> Why Textbooks Count, 2014, Cambridge Assessment, University of Cambridge, page 19.

<sup>4</sup> Hattie J (2012) ‘Visible Learning for Teachers, Maximising Impact on Learning, pages 67-74.

# Recommendations

## For Government and its agencies:

- **DfE and its agencies** should commit to sufficient lead-in times for changes for which the sector will have to undertake significant planning to implement. This includes releasing relevant materials in good time.
- **DfE** should review the DfE protocol to ensure it is fit for purpose, and takes full regard of the workload implications of any change.
- **DfE** should commit to using its influence to disseminate the principles and messages of this report through system leaders.
- **Ofsted** should continue to communicate the clarification paragraphs in the inspection framework through updates and other relevant channels.
- **Ofsted** should continue to monitor inspection reports to ensure no particular methods of planning are praised as exemplars and ensure training of inspectors emphasises the commitment in the framework.

## For school leaders:

- **SLT** should ensure there is ongoing work to develop a shared understanding of effective teaching to inform planning, underpinned by effective continuous professional development.
- **SLT** should not automatically require the same planning format across the school.
- **SLT** should review demands made on teachers in relation to planning to ensure that minimum requirements to be effective are made. Where more intensive plans are needed for pedagogical reasons, a review date is set.
- **Senior and middle leaders** should ensure, as a default expectation that a fully resourced, collaboratively produced, scheme of work is in place for all teachers for the start of each term.
- **Senior and middle leaders** should make clear who will be planning new schemes of work and associated resources, what time they will have available to do so, and how this will be made available to all staff in a timely fashion.
- **SLT** should ensure that the highest quality resources are available, valuing professionally produced resources as much as those created in-house.
- **SLT** should consider aggregating PPA into units of time which allow for substantial planning.
- **SLT** should work with middle and subject leaders to identify alternative ways to evidence 'effective teaching and planning', emphasising teacher development.
- **Subject and phase leaders** should lead discussions on quality assurance with SLT/governors to help them understand where a subject- or phase-specific approach may be most appropriate – and why the volume of paper plans may be an inadequate proxy.

**For teachers:**

- **Teachers** should engage in collaborative planning to develop their skills and knowledge, to share their expertise, and to benefit from the expertise of their peers.
- **Teachers** should consider the use of externally produced and quality assured resources, such as textbooks or teacher guides.

**Other bodies:**

- **ITT providers** should review their demands on trainee teachers and concentrate on the purpose of planning and how to plan across a sequence of lessons.
- **Subject associations** and **school networks and chains** should review their offer to teachers on evidence of effective practice, research and resources.
- **Publishers** should continue to produce better quality textbooks, focussed on the central, enduring knowledge of a subject or curriculum area, which teachers can then supplement with more up-to-date examples or case studies.

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