

In September, an article in the TES introduced the new academic year as the 'year of meltdown' for teaching staff. Referring to a raft of new initiatives ranging from the new Key Stage 3 curriculum to the Building Schools for the Future programme, the author predicted that many schools may drown in a sea of changes, administration and bureaucracy. There is certainly nothing new about schools having to cope with this kind of thing: I started working in education in 1998, and I don't think a month has gone by without the launch of a new government programme or the introduction of additional monitoring or administrative requirements. What is interesting, however – and arguably quite concerning – is the assumption in the article that the burden of any changes will be borne primarily by teaching staff. This assumption comes more than five years after the introduction of the Workload Agreement, which was introduced specifically to reduce the burden of administration on teaching staff. Hand-in-hand with the workforce remodelling initiative, the Agreement established a programme for the reduction and eventual phasing out of examination invigilation and the provision of cover for absent colleagues, and introduced ring-fenced Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time for all teaching staff. It also identified a list of 21 tasks, defined as administrative in nature (see list at end of article), which teachers should not routinely be required to carry out. The introduction of Teaching and Learning Responsibility points (TLRs) in January 2006 reinforced the content of the agreement by ensuring that all additional allowances were allocated for learning-related responsibilities rather than administrative ones.

The introduction of the Agreement, together with a number of pathfinder projects across the country, heralded a flurry of support staff restructuring and the creation of additional roles. In my own school, I seized on the remodelling agenda as a golden opportunity – a government mandate to introduce changes that I had wanted for years and hadn't had the backing to do. It was a long and sometimes difficult process, and by no means perfect, but there is little doubt that the changes enabled teaching staff to focus more of their time on learning, *and* allowed the extension and development of the support staff team to include people with experience beyond the world of education who were able to bring their own approaches and expertise to revitalise the support staff team.

Whilst I am sure that many schools went through a similar process to mine, it would seem that others took a more reactive approach, or - in some cases - just overlooked some of the content of the agreement. I have taken up roles in two schools over the last couple of years, and in both of them I have been quite shocked by the lack of a coherent response to some of the requirements of the workload agreement. There have been two aspects to this: firstly, there are areas where the requirements of the agreement have been met, but in a way which has a damaging impact on other areas of the school, effectively shifting the problem rather than solving it, the most notable example of this is the response of some schools to the requirement to reduce cover done by teachers. The second group of issues, relating mainly to the '21 tasks', is where teachers are simply continuing to carry out some or all of the duties identified by the workload agreement as administrative. In the remainder of this article, I will identify and describe some of those areas where it would seem that the workload agreement may still not be fully implemented. I will then offer suggestions for how this can be addressed within schools.

Cover

All teachers are very much aware of the requirements relating to the reduction of cover for absent colleagues to a maximum of 38 hours per year. In some schools, however, whilst the requirements of the agreement may have been met, this has often been at the expense of the existing support staff team (technicians taken from their main duties to cover lessons, for example) or even of the Leadership Team, who are not subject to the workload agreement restrictions and who may thus find themselves as very expensive cover, inevitably reducing their effectiveness elsewhere.

In those schools which embraced the spirit as well as the letter of workforce remodelling, the response to the reduction in teachers' cover and the introduction of PPA time has normally led to the recruitment of cover supervisors. Usually employed at Scale 4-6, cover supervisors are used first for cover, before supply teachers or existing teaching staff. Whilst there is of course a financial commitment involved in taking on permanent full-time staff, in my experience the benefits far outweigh the costs. Cover Supervisors offer much better value for money than the £150-£200 per day spent on supply teachers, and they have the benefit of familiarity with students, and with school policy and procedure. Unlike supply teachers, cover supervisors know that they will be back in school the next day, and the students know this too. This makes it far more likely that discipline issues will be followed through.

A further benefit of Cover Supervisors is that, when they are not working, they can be deployed throughout the school on tasks ranging from organising classroom displays to assisting with after-school clubs, typing up schemes of work, helping out with admin or even answering the switchboard. To avoid misunderstandings, I would recommend that this flexibility is written clearly into the job description and referred to at interview. As long as this is done, then Cover Supervisors will prove themselves excellent value for money and will become an integral part of the support staff team.

Invigilation

As from September 2006, teaching staff should not routinely be invigilating in any examinations – external or internal – where the timetable has been suspended and an exam timetable put in place. Whilst this has been largely implemented in the case of external examinations, the picture is less clear with regard to mock and other internal exams. In addition, in many schools much external invigilation has tended to be carried out by retired teaching staff, or by agency supply teachers at normal (i.e. expensive) supply rates.

Whilst there is an argument that it is always a good idea to have one or two trained teachers on an invigilation team, there is absolutely no reason why the vast majority of invigilators should not be people from a variety of backgrounds – ranging from cleaners and lunchtime supervisors to retired university professors - as long as they are provided with appropriate induction and training. Invigilation will always be casual work, and will attract part-time or retired people. The best approach would be to advertise for a 'pool' of invigilators who can all receive training and then be called upon as and when required. The local paper normally proves to be a good source of applicants, and hourly rates will normally range from £6.50 to £10 per hour.

It is worth noting that whilst invigilators may be a casual role, it is an extremely important one. Recruitment of invigilators should follow exactly the same process as

any other staff recruitment: a job description and person specification should be drafted, and interested candidates should fill in an application form and attend a formal interview. Finally, I would always recommend that there is one experienced person who is nominated as the 'Lead Invigilator' who has responsibility for overseeing the process and for flagging up any issues with school management.

Collecting Money – Educational Visits

Collecting of money from pupils and parents is the first activity named in the list of twenty-one tasks which teachers should no longer carry out. However, I am aware that in many schools this change has certainly not been implemented, especially in relation to educational visits. Teachers are still expected to maintain a list of students attending a visit, to take money from them and to hand it in to the office for banking. Quite apart from the fact that it is no longer in the teaching contract to do this, the collection of cash by teachers is not really acceptable from a financial management viewpoint either. Teachers do not have the time or the training to record transactions properly, nor do they have anywhere appropriate to keep money. It is also unlikely that they will issue receipts. Some trips – especially overseas visits - can cost quite a lot of money, and it is not unusual for teaching staff to turn up at the office with a batch of cheques and cash totalling hundreds of pounds, which has been accumulating in their desk drawer or their handbag.

The workload agreement specifies that the collection of cash should be centralised, and I have certainly seen this work very effectively. A member of support staff (probably one already involved in collecting income) should be designated as the educational visit contact for students. Any teacher organising a trip should then simply inform that member of staff of the details, and which students could potentially take part. Those students should then be able to bring their payments to the office at a designated time, have their contributions recorded and receive receipts. Whilst this process can be done manually with spreadsheets, there is a very useful software package called Identitrip which can help to streamline the process, setting up a database for each trip (using links to the MIS system), recording payments, issuing receipts and producing reports for visit leaders. The system certainly saves time, but just as importantly – it provides a secure centralised record of activity and relieves teaching staff of a role which they should definitely no longer be performing.

Additional Roles

The workload agreement has led to the introduction of many additional support staff roles within schools, all of which can be extremely effective in reducing the administrative burden on teaching staff and school leadership. Whilst it is not possible to describe them all in detail in this article, a brief overview of some of the key roles is provided below:-

- **Pastoral Managers:** full-time support staff who assist, or even replace, Heads of Year in dealing with pastoral issues. Often from a youth work or similar background, the advantage of this role is that the staff don't teach and are thus available to students all day.
- **Cover / Exams / Data Manager:** Most schools will now have a member of support staff administrating cover, but the combination of this role with the management of examinations (including entries) and the analysis of performance

data can create a high-level management role (SO2 or higher) which would be attractive to a number of people with professional backgrounds. Cover, exams and data are all curriculum-focused, and knowledge of one can help understanding of the others. I would also recommend that the person in this role manages and oversees the cover supervisors.

- **Faculty Support Assistants:** traditionally, most schools have had a centralised administrative function. However, the requirements of the workload agreement have meant that the range and levels of administrative support for teaching departments has grown considerably. It has therefore made sense for a number of schools to introduce faculty-based administrative assistants who can carry out tasks ranging from arranging classroom displays to typing up lesson plans or checking reports. These assistants can either be based in the main office but allocated to particular departments, or in the faculties themselves. If the latter, it is important that they are encouraged to work together as a team, and to keep in touch with each other, possibly through a weekly meeting. This will mean that they will not feel isolated, that they can support one another when needed, and share ideas and suggestions.

A Way Forward

If this article has alerted you to one or more areas where your school is not meeting the workload agreement, then you will need a plan of action to try and rectify this. Rather than simply be reactive and attempting to 'plug the gap' as best you can, I would suggest a couple of additional things to make your solution more effective. The first would be to present the issue to the leadership team in a coherent way, explaining what the requirements are and where the school falls short. Secondly, if you have time, I would recommend that you take the opportunity to carry out a more general review of support staff roles and responsibilities, including a survey of teaching staff, to identify if there are any other areas where support is falling short. Any outcomes from this can then be incorporated into a set of proposals which you can be confident will improve support for teachers and for the school as a whole.

Links

The workload agreement:

<http://www.tda.gov.uk/remodelling/nationalagreement.aspx>

Identitrip: <http://www.pinecone-education.co.uk/products/identitrip.html>

The Workload Agreement: Key Aspects

- 10% of timetable to be blocked off as **PPA time** (by Sep 2005)
- **Cover for absent colleagues** to be reduced to no more than 38 hours per year (by Sep 2004)
- **Invigilation** of external examinations, OR for internal examinations which replicate the format of external exams (i.e. where the timetable is suspended) - not to be routinely required of teaching staff (by Sept 2005).
- **21 Tasks** defined as administrative not to be routinely carried out by teachers (from September 2003):-
 - Collecting and receiving money from pupils and parents (includes educational visits);
 - Investigating pupil absence;
 - Bulk photocopying;
 - Typing or making word-processed versions of written material and producing revisions of such versions;
 - Wordprocessing, copying and distributing bulk communications, including standard letters;
 - Producing class lists;
 - Keeping and filing records;
 - Preparing, setting up and taking down classroom displays;
 - Producing analyses of attendance figures;
 - Producing analyses of examination results;
 - Collating pupil reports;
 - Administration of work experience;
 - Administration of public and internal examinations;
 - Administration of cover for absent teachers;
 - Ordering, setting up and maintaining ICT equipment and software;
 - Ordering supplies and equipment;
 - Cataloguing, preparing, issuing, maintaining and stocktaking materials and equipment;
 - Taking verbatim notes or producing formal minutes of meetings;
 - Co-ordinating and submitting funding and other bids;
 - Transferring manual data about pupils into computerised school management systems, or inputting data electronically;
 - Managing the data in school management systems.

Job Description

Post:	Cover Supervisor
Grade:	Equivalent to APT & C Scale 5 – Points 22-25: £18,907-£20,736 p.a. (pay award pending)
Hours:	37 hours per week, term-time plus one week.
Pro-rata:	£16,242-£17,813 p.a.

The Purpose of the Job:

- To supervise classes in the event of teacher absence.
- To provide other support to teaching departments when direct lesson supervision is not required.

Relationships

The postholder will be a member of the Curriculum Support Team, and as such will be responsible to the Curriculum Support Team Leader and, through him / her to the Assistant Principal (Finance and Business Management) and the Principal. The day-to-day work of the post-holder may be supervised and directed by Faculty and Subject leaders as appropriate.

General

There is an expectation that the post-holder will support the ethos of the Academy, and will work towards the Academy's aims as expressed in the Academy Improvement Plan and other relevant documentation.

Specific Responsibilities:

- Supervision of tutor groups and classes in the case of teacher absence.
- Allocation and explanation to students of work set by the absent teacher or his/her Head of Department.
- Provision of in-class assistance to students during lessons covered.
- Referral of disciplinary or other student issues to Heads of Subject / Faculty and/or pastoral staff as appropriate.
- Provision of administrative, clerical and other support to teaching departments.
- Creation of classroom and corridor displays across the school site as required.
- Provision of supervisory and/or administrative assistance relating to extra-curricular activities.
- Supervision of students before school, and at morning break or lunch times.
- Invigilation of examinations.

The post-holder may also be required to carry out other duties appropriate to your post, as negotiated with the Curriculum Support Team Leader or other senior staff.

Training

The post-holder will be expected to undertake development and training appropriate to the post.

Person Specification

Post: **Cover Supervisor**

ESSENTIAL	DESIRABLE
<p><u>Knowledge and Skills</u></p> <p>Excellent oral communication skills, especially in relation to children and young people.</p> <p>Ability to supervise and manage groups of children and young people with confidence.</p> <p>Numeracy and literacy.</p> <p>A positive attitude towards children and young people, including the ability to demonstrate and promote positive values, attitudes and behaviour.</p> <p>Ability to work collaboratively with colleagues across the organisation.</p> <p>Administrative, organisational and ICT skills.</p> <p>The ability to work under pressure and prioritise work in a busy school environment.</p>	<p>Knowledge of National Curriculum programme of study for at least one subject area.</p> <p>An understanding of the teaching and learning process</p>
<p><u>Qualifications and Experience</u></p> <p>Experience of working with children or young people</p> <p>Qualified to GCSE level or equivalent</p>	<p>Experience of supervising groups of children or young people</p> <p>Experience of working in an education environment</p> <p>Qualified to A Level or Degree standard</p>
<p><u>Personal Qualities</u></p> <p>Obvious enthusiasm and energy</p> <p>An excellent health and attendance record over the last two years</p> <p>Flexibility and a 'can do' attitude</p>	