

**ORAL STATEMENT TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND  
ASSEMBLY**

**RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF TEACHER  
WORKLOAD REPORT**

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# Response to the Independent Review of Teacher Workload Report

## Introduction

Mr Speaker, I hope everyone in this Chamber would agree that teaching is a profession that has the utmost importance in our society. Every day, teachers and school leaders shape the lives, aspirations, and futures of our children and young people. Our education system depends on their professionalism, skill, and commitment.

For too long, workload has been a persistent issue for the profession. Previous efforts to address this issue have not achieved the change necessary and continuing on the same path would inevitably lead to a further deterioration in wellbeing, morale, and the attractiveness of teaching and school leadership as a career.

A more sustained, system-wide action is required.

This is why I am taking forward TransformED, my wider programme of reform to modernise the education system, strengthen teaching as a profession and raise standards for all learners. Through TransformED, we are deliberately creating the conditions in which teachers can thrive by increasing investment in professional learning, improving coherence across the system, reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and ensuring that support is focused on what matters most - excellent teaching and learning.

Addressing workload is at the centre of my TransformED agenda. The curriculum, assessment and qualifications reforms have been deliberately designed to remove avoidable pressures, simplify processes and give teachers back time to focus on high quality teaching and learning. I therefore appointed an Independent Panel to undertake a comprehensive review of teacher and school leader workload.

The Panel's report provides a robust, evidence-informed assessment of the pressures facing the profession and sets out 27 recommendations for change across the education system.

Today, I am setting out my Department's formal response to that Review.

Mr Speaker, addressing workload is not optional. It is essential if we are to value the profession, retain talented teachers, support effective leadership, and ensure the long-term stability of our education system.

Before I go into detail on the actions I propose to bring forward, I think it is important to contextualise my commitment to the teaching profession and address some of the recent claims about the teaching workforce.

## Teachers' Pay

Since my appointment as Education Minister, I have championed the teaching profession and fought to ensure that they are properly recognised. Significant progress has been made in improving teacher pay, reflecting both the vital importance of the profession and the level of responsibility teachers carry every day. **Since February 2024 the starting salary for teachers has increased by 36.4% to £32,916, while average teacher pay has risen by almost £10,000.**

These changes place teacher remuneration on a more competitive and sustainable footing and send a clear signal of my commitment to recognising teachers' professional status.

### **Leavers from the profession**

In relation to recent claims that large numbers of teachers are leaving the profession, While I take the issues of workload and wellbeing extremely seriously, it is important to distinguish between anecdotal reports and the available evidence on workforce trends. Claims that large numbers of teachers have been leaving the profession due to burnout are not borne out by payroll data. The employment data for teachers continues to show a broadly stable teaching workforce, suggesting that while pressures undoubtedly exist, they are not translating into the widespread departure of teachers.

### **Action Plan Commitments**

That said, there is absolutely no room for complacency, and I am steadfast in my belief that action must be taken to address teacher and school leader workload and ensure that the profession remains a desirable career choice.

The Action Plan I am publishing today represents a decisive shift, from piecemeal initiatives towards a coordinated, system-level approach. It brings together actions to address each of the 27 recommendations, either fully or in part, with clear ownership, governance, and timescales.

### **Reducing Administrative Burden**

Mr Speaker, a consistent and powerful message from the Independent Review Panel is that excessive administration has eroded professional trust and drawn teachers and school leaders away from what matters most: teaching, learning and supporting pupils.

In response, we will take action to identify and reduce unnecessary administrative tasks and excessive workload both within schools and at a system level.

The Teachers Negotiating Committee will establish a subgroup to monitor system-wide administration requirements, evaluate progress made in reducing bureaucracy and identify further actions required to reduce the administration burden on schools.

In addition, a Baker Day in the 2026–27 academic year will be designated specifically to allow schools to engage in a structured discussion to identify and reduce excessive workload at a local level.

### **Tracking and Planning**

Excessive tracking and planning requirements were among the highlighted workload concerns during the Independent Review Process. We will therefore take steps to ensure that tracking and planning is purposeful, proportionate, and focused on supporting learning and professional dialogue, rather than compliance or excessive data capture.

The Department will issue clear guidance that no more than three formal, school-wide tracking points should take place in a school year. This provides a clear and consistent benchmark across the system and is intended to curb the growth of repetitive and low-value tracking practices.

In relation to planning for learning, the Action Plan reinforces the principle that planning should support teachers in delivering high-quality teaching and learning and facilitate meaningful professional dialogue at school level. Clear guidance will be issued to schools to ensure planning processes are proportionate, focused on impact, and do not place unnecessary administrative burden on teachers or school leaders.

### **Supporting School Leaders**

Mr Speaker, it is clear that the role of school principals has become substantially more complex over the last decade. Balancing educational leadership with significant operational, safeguarding, workforce and accountability responsibilities is challenging. If we are to secure a high-performing and sustainable school system, we must ensure that school leadership remains a viable, attractive and properly supported role. That is why the Action Plan responds decisively on this issue.

We are committing to the phased introduction of a cadre of administrative support for schools in order to test what works best in the Northern Ireland school system. These roles will be designed to absorb non-educational tasks such as complaints handling, compliance, procurement, and data management — freeing leaders to focus on teaching, learning, and improvement.

In parallel, a review of the Workload Agreement will examine the working patterns of school leaders, and schools will be advised to appoint a designated governor as a workload and wellbeing champion to strengthen governance awareness and support.

We will also develop an improved and more robust complaints handling framework for schools. This will be designed to support early resolution, provide greater consistency across the system, and ensure that vexatious or unreasonable complaints are managed proportionately. By strengthening system-level support and clarifying processes, we are seeking to protect leadership capacity and reduce unnecessary workload.

### **Working Time, Flexibility, and Wellbeing**

The Review indicated that workload pressures are often compounded by a lack of clarity around working time and expectations.

We accept the Panel's conclusion that while an average working week of 35 to 40 hours may be reasonable, it would be unreasonable for teachers to be habitually working an average of 40 hours or more across the school year.

Boards of Governors will therefore be reminded of their duty of care to avoid excessive workload cultures, and TNC will develop protocols for identifying and addressing sustained excessive workload.

In addition, guidance will issue to provide greater flexibility for teachers, allowing work to be completed at a time and place of their choice, if it has been agreed with the principal that their presence in school is not required.

We will also develop and issue clear protocols and guidance to support consultation and agreement on collective activities within Directed Time Budgets. This approach will help strengthen professional dialogue, build mutual understanding, and ensure that directed time is used proportionately and fairly, while giving principals and Boards of Governors greater clarity and confidence in managing arrangements in line with their duty of care.

## **Professional Learning and Support**

Mr Speaker, workload reduction must sit alongside professional empowerment.

Through TransformED, every teacher will have guaranteed access to high-quality, meaningful professional learning throughout their career. By strengthening induction, early career support, mentoring and leadership development, we aim to ensure that teachers are supported, and that professional learning contributes to confidence, wellbeing and retention so that teaching remains a fulfilling and respected career.

Managing complex pupil behaviour will be a priority within Teacher Professional Learning funding in the 2026–27 academic year, with additional training, guidance, and system-level support to ensure that schools are not left to manage these challenges alone.

A key theme emerging from the Independent Review was the importance of restoring professional trust and ensuring that teachers are able to exercise their judgement without undue pressure.

Exposure to challenging behaviour and online abuse is a significant contributor to teacher stress and detrimental to their wellbeing. The EA are in the final stages of agreeing a Preventing Violence at Work framework and an awareness campaign will be taken forward to highlight the importance of respecting the professional judgement of teachers and engaging with them in an appropriate and proportionate manner. Teachers are highly trained professionals, and strong outcomes for children are best achieved where relationships between schools, parents, and communities are built on mutual respect and trust.

## **Special Educational Needs**

Mr Speaker, it is clear that action is required to address the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN) support.

Through the SEN Reform Agenda, we are moving towards a more child-centred, needs-based system, focused on early intervention and reducing reliance on rigid processes.

Crucially, the development of an Integrated Workforce Planning Framework will examine the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to SEN, with actions to address identified pressures.

## **Generative Artificial Intelligence**

Mr Speaker, the Workload Review rightly identified Generative AI as a significant opportunity to reduce teacher and school leader workload.

We are committed to ensuring that the role of AI is fully embedded within the planned refresh of education technology and approached in a coordinated, strategic and professionally guided manner.

The Department will invest over £10m to support the roll-out of system-aware generative AI tools, alongside high-quality professional development and training, over the next two years.

Through this initiative, teachers and school leaders will be supported through a structured programme of professional learning designed to build confidence, understanding and practical capability in the use of GenAI. The focus will be on safe, ethical and effective application, with

staff encouraged to develop skills progressively and apply GenAI to everyday professional activities in ways that directly support teaching, leadership and workload reduction.

International research demonstrates that GenAI can provide support and achieve significant time-savings in activities such as lesson and resource planning, drafting feedback, summarising pupil work, managing documentation and supporting administrative tasks.

The potential of GenAI has already been tested in a Northern Ireland context through two proof-of-concept studies led by C2K, in partnership with Microsoft and Google. Findings from participating schools have been extremely encouraging and include significant time savings and improvements in wellbeing for teachers and school leaders, along with improvements in pupil attainment.

### **Inspection and Collegial Practice**

Finally, the Department welcomes the Panel's endorsement of the redesigned school inspection framework. The new framework is explicitly focused on rebuilding trust across the education system, reducing the workload associated with inspection, and establishing a more supportive, proportionate, and empowering approach to accountability.

It also places strong emphasis on a school's capacity to develop and sustain a "community of learning," encompassing both internal and external relationships. Collegial practice is central to this approach and ETI will recognise and reflect on this within their reports.

### **Governance and Delivery**

Mr Speaker, this Action Plan is ambitious, but it is also realistic and deliverable.

A Workload Implementation Group has been established to maintain momentum and accountability, and this will work closely with the Teachers' Negotiating Committee. Regular progress reporting will ensure transparency.

I am clear, however, that delivery will depend on collaboration, shared ownership, and sustained industrial stability. This Action Plan represents a significant commitment to the profession, and it is in everyone's interest that it is given the space to succeed.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, Mr Speaker, this Action Plan sends a clear message: the wellbeing, expertise and professional judgement of teachers and school leaders is vitally important.

By tackling workload systematically, investing in leadership and professional learning, and reforming the structures that generate unnecessary burden, we are taking decisive steps to ensure that teaching remains a valued, sustainable, and attractive profession.

Thank you.