



Department of  
**Education**  
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# **The Independent Review of Teacher Workload in Northern Ireland**

## **Action Plan**

**28 April 2026**

## **Ministerial Foreword**

Teaching is one of the most important and influential professions in our society. Every day, teachers and school leaders shape the lives, aspirations and futures of our children and young people. The quality of an education system can never exceed the quality of its teachers, and supporting their professional growth, wellbeing and working conditions is fundamental to educational excellence.

Workload has, for too long, been a persistent concern for the profession. While previous efforts have sought to address this, it is clear that more sustained, system-wide action is required. That is why, in May 2025, I appointed an Independent Panel to undertake a comprehensive review of teacher and school leader workload. The Panel's final report, submitted on 28 November 2025, provides a clear, evidence-informed foundation for change, setting out recommendations that address workload at classroom, school and system level.

I am sincerely grateful to the Independent Panel for the depth and ambition of their work, and to the many teachers and school leaders who contributed their time, expertise and lived experience. Their contribution reinforces my belief that meaningful reform must be shaped with the profession and grounded in trust, respect and partnership. I am steadfast in my commitment to supporting, enabling and empowering teachers, recognising their professionalism and the central role they play in delivering high-quality education.

This Action Plan reflects that commitment. It sits alongside 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. These reforms, when fully embedded and supported, will make a tangible difference to workload and wellbeing.

Addressing workload is not optional. It is essential to valuing the profession, retaining talented teachers, supporting effective school leadership and securing the long-term stability and success of our education system. This Action Plan translates the Review's

recommendations into practical, deliverable actions that protect professional autonomy, promote sustainable working practices and reinforce the status and importance of teaching. It represents a clear statement of intent: that teachers' time, expertise and commitment are valued, and that the system must work for them as well as through them.

By working in partnership with teachers, school leaders and their representatives, I am confident that we can make meaningful and lasting progress. This Action Plan signals a renewed commitment to investing in teachers and teaching, building a more supportive environment for the profession, and ensuring that every child and young person benefits from high-quality, motivated and well-supported educators.

The actions set out here represent a significant commitment to teachers and school leaders. Their successful delivery will depend on continued collaboration, shared ownership and a collective determination across the education system to make this change a reality. I am confident that, through sustained partnership and a renewed focus on teaching and learning, we can achieve meaningful reductions in workload and create a system in which the teaching profession is fully supported, valued and empowered to excel.

**Paul Givan MLA**  
**Minister of Education**

# Introduction: a fresh approach to teaching in Northern Ireland

McKinsey's well-established insight that "*the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers*" remains as relevant today as when it was first articulated. International evidence consistently shows that high-performing education systems place teachers and teaching quality at the centre of their education system recognising teachers not simply as deliverers of policy, but as the foundational asset on which long-term educational outcomes depend.

Across the world, however, governments face a shared challenge: how to attract talented individuals into teaching, support them effectively throughout their careers and retain them in the profession over time.

The strongest systems respond with deliberate and sustained action. They recruit from a broad and academically strong pool of candidates, offer more flexible part-time routes into the profession, and ensure that initial teacher education is rigorous, practical and grounded in evidence-based classroom practice. Crucially, they also make teaching an attractive, respected career choice by aligning pay, professional development, career progression and working conditions behind a clear vision of professional excellence.

**Northern Ireland's ambition is to match and exceed this international best practice. We are committed to making teaching a high-status, fulfilling profession that attracts skilled graduates and career-changers alike, and that offers a well-supported, meaningful career. We are, therefore, signalling a fresh approach to valuing and supporting teachers and teaching across our education system.**

Recent significant pay increases for teachers<sup>1</sup> in Northern Ireland reflect an important step in recognising the value of the profession and ensuring that teacher pay remains competitive, fair and reflective of the responsibility teachers carry.

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<sup>1</sup> Since February 2024, the starting salary of teachers has increased by 36.4% to £32,916, and the average pay for teachers has increased by £9,782 (23.8%).

Pay must sit alongside high-quality professional development that supports teachers at every stage of their career. High-performing systems invest in structured, ongoing professional learning that is purposeful, evidence-informed and directly relevant to teachers' classroom practice. Our approach through TransformED places teacher learning at the heart of improvement, enabling teachers to respond to changing learner needs and develop leadership capability. Professional development will no longer be seen as an add-on, but as an integral part of professional life.

Equally important are clear and credible career pathways. Teaching must offer opportunities for progression that value excellence in the classroom as much as formal leadership, allowing teachers to grow, specialise and contribute in different ways without feeling compelled to leave teaching to advance their careers. By broadening and strengthening these pathways, we aim to retain expertise in classrooms while also building leadership capacity across the system.

Critically, this fresh approach to the value of teachers and teaching is also centred on the recognition that workload matters. Evidence shows that excessive and poorly designed workload is a key driver of teacher attrition and dissatisfaction internationally.

Improving recruitment and retention, therefore, requires a whole-system commitment to managing workload more effectively, removing unnecessary burdens, streamlining processes and ensuring that teachers' time and energy are focused on activities that have the greatest impact on pupils' learning and wellbeing.

The response to the Independent Review of Teacher Workload outlined below is central to this but equally importantly, workload must not be seen as a series of individual actions but rather part of a coherent, system wide approach to ensuring teaching is an attractive and rewarding career.

This document, therefore, sets out not only the Department's response to the Independent Review's individual recommendations but also the wider context of transforming the education system to create a structural approach which invests in teachers and provides improved support and manageable workload. This includes investing in career-long professional development; reduced workload, better supported structural approaches to curriculum, assessment and qualifications; and a central commitment to enhance administrative support for school leaders. This represents a step change in the Department's approach.

Taken together, our aim is to implement wide-ranging reforms which provide a coherent strategy to enhance the attractiveness and status of teaching in Northern Ireland. By aligning competitive pay, high-quality professional development, meaningful career opportunities and a sustained focus on workload, we aim to create the conditions in which teachers can thrive and through which every learner can benefit from excellent teaching.

## **Valuing the teaching profession: key commitments to reduce workload**

**Annex A** sets out the Department's response to and next steps for each of the 27 recommendations of the Independent Review of Teacher Workload. Taken together, these commitments represent a decisive, system-level shift towards reducing unnecessary burden, protecting wellbeing and enabling teachers and school leaders to focus on high-quality teaching and learning.

Key commitments arising from the Review include:

- **Flexible working** - guidance will be issued providing greater flexibility for teachers in carrying out their duties.
- **Working hours** – protocols will be developed for addressing sustained excessive teacher workload and Boards of Governors will be advised of their duty of care in relation to this.
- **Workload and Wellbeing Governor** – a thorough examination of the working patterns of school leaders will be undertaken and a designated governor will be asked to act as a workload and wellbeing champion.
- **Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)** – system aware GenAI will be rolled out along with the resources, training and support to ensure it reduces the workload of teachers and school leaders.

- **Parental awareness** – 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 manner.
- **Unnecessary Administration** – action will be taken to identify and reduce unnecessary administrative tasks and excessive workload both within schools and at a system level.
- **Controlled assessment** – controlled assessment will be removed or significantly reduced across all CCEA qualifications and there will be greater flexibility for principals to manage controlled assessment demands within Directed Time Budgets, as well as permitting the use of a School Development Day to afford time for the marking and internal moderation of controlled assessment.
- **Internal tracking** – clear guidance will issue advising that there should be no more than three formal school wide tracking points in a school year.
- **Planning** – guidance will be developed and issued to ensure that planning processes support professional dialogue at school level rather than create an administrative burden for teachers and school leaders.
- **Training** – every teacher will have access to high-quality, meaningful professional learning that enhances their practice throughout their career.
- **Workload Assessments** - TNC will be engaged at an early stage of policy development to ensure workload impacts associated with new initiatives are fully considered.
- **Directed Time Budgets (DTBs)** – protocols and guidance will be developed to facilitate the consultation and agreement of collective activities within DTBs at school level.

- **Complaints handling** – a framework to facilitate the improved management of complaints will be disseminated across the education sector.

Together, these actions demonstrate a firm commitment to valuing the teaching profession not just in principle, but in practice by tackling workload systematically, protecting wellbeing and creating the conditions in which teachers and school leaders can thrive.

## Investment in teachers

Alongside these key workload measures, valuing teachers and teaching requires a high-quality professional learning approach that ensures every teacher, at every stage, has access to world-class development.

The Department's new strategy, *Leading Together for Excellence: A TransformED NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning*<sup>2</sup>, outlines a coherent, deliverable plan for renewed investment in teacher professional learning.

This strategy signals a renewed commitment to professional development in Northern Ireland. For teachers this means:

- **You will have guaranteed, sustained access to high-quality professional learning throughout your career**, not as a one-off entitlement or an optional extra, but as a core part of being a teacher in Northern Ireland.
- **Professional learning will be more relevant and more useful.** It will be grounded in evidence, aligned to curriculum priorities and focused on classroom practice.
- **You will have greater choice and agency, supported by sustained investment through the Teacher Professional Learning Fund.**

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<sup>2</sup> To be published in early May 2026.

- **You will be better supported through collaboration.** This strategy places strong emphasis on professional learning communities - within schools, across clusters and through subject networks.
- **You will benefit from clearer pathways and progression,** whether you choose to deepen expertise in the classroom, take on mentoring or coaching roles, or move into leadership. This strategy explicitly values advanced classroom practice and professional expertise, as well as formal leadership positions.

Importantly, this strategy is also about respect and sustainability. By strengthening induction, early career support, mentoring and leadership development, it aims to ensure that teachers are supported, not overloaded, and that professional learning contributes to confidence, wellbeing and retention so that teaching remains a fulfilling and respected career.

## Leading Together for Excellence: Headline Commitments

| Area                                     | Headline Commitment  |
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| <b>Professional Learning Entitlement</b> | Establish a clear, career-long entitlement to high-quality professional learning for every teacher and leader in Northern Ireland.   |
| <b>System Coherence</b>                  | Move from fragmented provision to a coherent, system-wide professional learning framework aligned to TransformedED priorities.   |
| <b>Sustained Investment</b>              | Sustain multi-year investment in professional learning, including the £31m Teacher Professional Learning Fund, enabling schools to plan and deliver high-impact development.                               |
| <b>Curriculum-Aligned Learning</b>       | Ensure professional learning is tightly aligned to system priorities, notably curriculum reform, and statutory assessment, with strengthened subject-specific development including literacy and numeracy. |

| Area  | Headline Commitment  |
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| <b>Quality Assurance</b>                      | Commission and quality-assure professional learning to ensure it is evidence-informed, sustained and focused on improving classroom practice and pupil outcomes. |
| <b>Digital Professional Learning Platform</b> | Deliver a unified digital platform to provide equitable access, transparent recording and collaborative professional learning opportunities for all teachers.    |
| <b>Professional Standards and Pathways</b>    | Modernise teacher competences and introduce leadership standards to underpin a coherent professional learning continuum and clear career pathways.               |
| <b>Early Career Support</b>                   | Guarantee consistent, high-quality induction and early professional development, strengthening mentoring and guided learning for Early Career Teachers.          |
| <b>Leadership Development</b>                 | Strengthen leadership development at every level, including middle leaders, senior leaders, principals and system leaders.                                       |
| <b>Collaboration and Communities</b>          | Invest in professional learning communities, subject networks and school-to-school collaboration to build collective expertise and reduce isolation.             |
| <b>Research-Informed Practice</b>             | Improve access to education research and strengthen the connection between evidence and practice across all professional learning.                               |

## **TransformED: A long-term approach to create a more sustainable education system**

Across curriculum, statutory assessment and qualifications, Northern Ireland has over the past two decades relied on a model that placed a disproportionate share of workload on schools and in turn on individual teachers.

This has driven avoidable workload by requiring schools to interpret vague curriculum and assessment expectations, design materials from scratch, and manage complex assessment and moderation processes locally. Reducing this structural workload burden on teachers is, therefore a central, long-term objective of the TransformED Programme.

Across curriculum, assessment and qualifications, these reforms have been deliberately designed to remove avoidable pressures, simplify processes and give teachers back time to focus on high-quality teaching and learning.

### **Curriculum**

The current curriculum lacks clarity and precision. Its vagueness has meant that school leaders and teachers have had to make too many decisions about content and sequencing, increasing planning demands and requiring the creation of extensive materials at school level.

The new curriculum will provide greater clarity and specificity, supported by high-quality resources and lesson plans, reducing the burden on schools and ensuring greater consistency for pupils.

### **Assessment**

The previous arrangements for statutory Key Stage assessment, based on teacher judgement against Levels of Progression, were highly workload-intensive, particularly due to moderation requirements.

The Department's new statutory assessment framework is built around short, curriculum-aligned, standardised assessments, with auto-marking wherever possible. This model is designed deliberately to minimise teacher workload while improving the usefulness of assessment information.

### **Qualifications**

The new CCEA GCSE and A-level specifications will remove controlled assessment and coursework wherever they are not essential. In subjects where practical skills must

be directly assessed, such as Technology, PE and Art these components will of course be retained but streamlined.

Currently, internal assessment places a significant burden on teachers, who must design, supervise, mark and moderate coursework. Removing non-essential components will reduce workload, give teachers back time to teach, and allow pupils to focus their energy on high-quality learning.

Taken together, these reforms represent a fundamental shift away from placing the weight of system complexity on individual teachers. By clarifying expectations, standardising where appropriate and removing unnecessary assessment and administrative demands, the TransformED Programme offers a genuine opportunity not only to strengthen educational outcomes, but to make a sustained and meaningful reduction in the workload of teachers and school leaders.

## **Supporting school leaders**

School leaders play a critical role across the education system. International research consistently shows that leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on pupil outcomes, shaping not only what happens in classrooms but also the culture, conditions and professional learning that enable teachers and pupils to thrive. Schools rarely outperform their leaders.

High-performing education systems invest deliberately and systematically in leadership development across the career continuum. They identify leadership potential early, provide structured preparation for leadership roles and sustain ongoing professional learning for leaders at every stage. Leadership is not treated as an individual accomplishment, but as a system capacity to be grown, supported and renewed over time.

Leadership development in Northern Ireland has been fragmented and limited. The Department is committed to investing in a coherent and inclusive approach to leadership development that identifies potential early, prepares leaders thoroughly and sustains their growth throughout their careers. In particular, we will:

- Develop and pilot a replacement qualification for headship, aligned to the contemporary demands of Principalship.

- Develop a dedicated professional learning programme for experienced Principals, recognising their ongoing development needs and strengthening their role as system leaders.
- Strengthen leadership pathways across the system, ensuring coherence, progression and alignment from middle leadership to system leadership.
- Strengthen the provision of school-to-school support through a Leaders of Education Programme.

Through deliberate investment in leadership, Northern Ireland will strengthen teaching, improve outcomes for learners and build a resilient, outward-looking education system capable of sustained improvement

However, this on its own is not sufficient. Over the past three decades, the role of school leadership has expanded dramatically, with a significant and sustained increase in administrative responsibility. Running a school in 2026 involves navigating a far more complex operating environment, shaped by expanded regulatory and statutory requirements, safeguarding and child protection duties, data collection and reporting, workforce management and digital compliance. These responsibilities have accumulated over time and now place a substantial administrative burden on principals and senior leadership teams.

This shift reflects wider changes in the education landscape. Schools are now required to interface with a broader range of agencies, respond to heightened expectations around inclusion, wellbeing and mental health, manage increasingly complex HR and financial processes, and adapt to rapid technological change. While some of these developments are necessary and positive, the cumulative effect has been to draw school leaders away from their core purpose: leading teaching and learning.

International research consistently shows that excessive administrative workload can dilute instructional leadership, reduce job satisfaction and impact retention among school leaders.

Evidence from high-performing education systems demonstrates that this need not be the case. Jurisdictions such as Finland, Singapore and parts of Canada have deliberately invested in non-teaching administrative and business support roles within schools, allowing principals and senior leadership teams to focus on strategic

leadership and pedagogical improvement. These systems recognise that effective leadership depends not only on individual capability, but on the conditions in which leaders work.

For example, many systems now routinely employ school business managers, operations officers or administrative support with specialist expertise in finance, HR and compliance. OECD studies have highlighted that where administrative support is embedded at school level, leaders report lower workload pressure and greater capacity to drive improvement.

The Department recognises that if school leadership is to remain strong, attractive and sustainable, improved support is essential. Expectations on schools have increased significantly, and the structures that support them must keep pace. **The Department is, therefore, committed to investing in strengthened administrative support at school level to ensure that teacher and leadership capacity is protected and used where it has the greatest impact: on learning, inclusion and outcomes for children and young people.**

To take this work forward, the Department will establish a dedicated working group with representation from the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC). This group will scope the purpose, remit and design of an enhanced administrative support role in schools, drawing on international evidence and the lived experience of school leadership teams. Its focus will be on ensuring that any new provision is practical, proportionate and genuinely relieves administrative burden, rather than creating additional complexity.

Building on this work, the Department will take forward the phased rollout of a cadre of administrative support for schools to test what works best in Northern Ireland. These will be senior administrative staff who may lead on matters such as complaints, FOI, GDPR, procurement and management of support staff without undermining the authority of the school leader.

This approach reflects a clear commitment to supporting schools and ensuring that they are equipped to meet modern demands. By investing in the right support structures, the system can enable teachers and school leaders to spend more time where it matters most: improving outcomes for learners.

## **Special Educational Needs (SEN) Reform**

Supporting the rising number of children with special educational needs in our schools has created additional workload challenges both for teachers and school leaders. The Department's SEN Reform Agenda and Transformation Programme is designed to ensure children receive "the right support, from the right people, at the right time, and in the right place." The Graduated Response Framework is aimed at equipping schools to provide earlier support before children reach crisis point or require statutory statements. Transformation funding will enable a range of early intervention approaches to be tested in schools from September 2026.

The Reform Agenda includes a commitment to the development of an Integrated Workforce Planning Framework, intended to ensure a supported, valued, and highly skilled workforce that is equipped and empowered to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for pupils with SEN.

As part of this, the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to SEN will be examined through the Integrated Workforce Planning Framework. Actions to address identified pressures will be developed and implemented following completion of this review.

## **Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)**

GenAI has the potential to transform professional practice in schools, with a particular and significant impact on reducing teacher and school leader workload. The Department is 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 through the Education Authority (EA) 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 groundbreaking 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.

GenAI offers substantial potential to reduce workload by automating or streamlining routine, low-value administrative and preparatory tasks. International research and emerging practice demonstrate that GenAI can effectively support activities such as lesson and resource planning, drafting feedback, summarising pupil work, managing documentation and supporting administrative tasks. This allows teachers and school leaders to focus more fully on high-quality instruction, professional judgement, pupil support and strategic leadership.

The potential of GenAI has already been demonstrated in a Northern Ireland context through two proof-of-concept studies led by C2K, in partnership with Microsoft and Google. Findings from participating schools were highly encouraging and included:

- Significant time savings, with an average reported workload reduction of 11 hours and 52 minutes per week per participant.
- 74.6% of participants reporting that GenAI use had already contributed to improvements in their wellbeing.
- 41.2% of participants reporting early improvements in pupil attainment, with a further 38.2% anticipating future benefits.
- Strong potential identified for supporting SEN provision and inclusive practice.
- Clear benefits in lesson creation, personalised support and automated feedback, with qualitative feedback highlighting substantial reductions in lesson planning time.
- Significant impact on school leadership and administrative workload, with almost half (48.7%) of reported time savings relating specifically to leadership and management tasks.

## **Annex A. Departmental Response and Next Steps to Recommendations from the Independent Review of Teacher Workload**

| <b>Number</b> | <b>Recommendation</b>  | <b>Departmental Response and Next Steps</b>  |
|---------------|--|--|
| 1             | <p>The Panel believes that the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC) has a critical leadership role to play in achieving the cultural shift required to create a more cohesive, collaborative and effective education system in which young people thrive. Accordingly, we recommend that the role, profile and status of the TNC should be enhanced and fully resourced. A development plan should be compiled setting out the core functions and resource requirements of an enhanced TNC.</p> | <p>The Department welcomes this recommendation and agrees that the TNC has a critical leadership role to play in driving the cultural shift required to build a more cohesive, collaborative and effective education system.</p> <p>The Department is clear that achieving sustained improvement, particularly in reducing teacher and school leader workload, strengthening professional trust and supporting staff wellbeing, requires strong, visible and well-resourced system leadership. In this context, the TNC is uniquely positioned to provide strategic direction, foster collaboration between partners and support consistent, system-wide approaches to workforce issues.</p> <p>To deliver this enhanced role effectively, the Department recognises the importance of ensuring that the TNC is fully functional, appropriately resourced and supported by robust governance and operational structures. The Department therefore agrees that work is required to strengthen the profile, capacity and impact of the TNC in line with its expanded leadership role.</p> <p>In response, the Department will work collaboratively with Management Side and the Northern Ireland Teachers' Council (NITC) to agree the necessary support structures and resource requirements, including the appointment of officers to enable the TNC to operate effectively and to deliver its enhanced remit. This work will support the development of a</p> |

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|   |  | <p>clearer strategic focus for the TNC and ensure that it has the capacity to lead and influence system-wide change.</p> <p>As part of this process, a development plan will be compiled, setting out the core functions, priorities and resource requirements of an enhanced TNC. This will provide clarity of purpose, strengthen accountability and ensure that the TNC is well positioned to fulfil its leadership role on behalf of the system.</p> <p>The Department views this recommendation as both timely and constructive and is confident that a strengthened and well-resourced TNC will make a significant contribution to creating the conditions in which collaboration flourishes and workload pressures are addressed more effectively.</p> <p><b>Timescale: An enhanced TNC to be in place by December 2026.</b></p>                             |
| 2 | <p>Directed Time Budgeting (DTB) should be subject to collective consultation and agreement at school level. TNC should develop protocols for negotiation at school level, thereby creating an architecture of collegiality in respect of schools' working time agreements, based on a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) approach appropriate to each school. TNC should oversee this approach and act as arbiter where resolution of disagreement is required.</p> | <p>The Department recognises that effective management of working time is central to teacher wellbeing, workload reduction and the creation of positive professional cultures within schools. It is essential that schools comply with TNC 2024/2 'The Workload Agreement' in order to maintain trust in this process.</p> <p>A collective, structured and collegial approach to agreeing Directed Time Budgets that reflects the specific context of each school is therefore both appropriate and necessary.</p> <p>The Department supports TNC in taking a leadership role in this area, including the development of a clear framework to support meaningful consultation and agreement at school level. TNC will develop and issue protocols and guidance to facilitate collective consultation and agreement on Directed Time Budgets. This will include:</p> |

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|   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance on appropriate consultation arrangements, including the establishment and operation of Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs) as appropriate; and</li> <li>• Clear protocols for the resolution of collective disagreement relating to school calendars and Directed Time Budget templates, providing clarity, consistency and confidence for all parties.</li> </ul> <p><b>Timescale: Protocols and guidance to be issued by December 2026.</b></p>  |
| 3 | <p>To create a degree of flexibility in respect of Planning, Preparation, and Assessment (PPA) time, the Panel recommends that where a teacher’s duties do not require physical presence in their school, they should be free to carry out such work, for example, preparation and marking, at a ‘time and place’ of their own choosing. The exercising of this option should be carried out in consultation with the school principal and in the context of the whole school needs.</p> | <p>The Department agrees that introducing greater flexibility in the use of Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time represents a positive and proportionate step towards reducing workload pressures and supporting professional autonomy for teachers.</p> <p>The Department recognises that many aspects of professional practice such as preparation, planning and marking do not always require a teacher’s physical presence in school. Where this is the case, enabling teachers to exercise flexibility over the time and place in which such work is undertaken can support wellbeing, improve work–life balance and promote more effective use of professional time.</p> <p>In this context, the Department fully supports the role of the TNC in developing and rolling out clear, practical guidance for schools. This guidance will be compliant with the Jordanstown Agreement and will provide a consistent framework to enable flexibility while safeguarding the effective operation of schools.</p> <p>The TNC guidance will confirm that teachers may carry out specified duties, such as preparation and marking off-site, where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• their physical presence in school is not required; and</li> </ul> |

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|   |   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there has been appropriate consultation and agreement with the school Principal, taking account of whole-school needs and priorities.</li> </ul> <p>This approach strikes an important balance between professional trust and collective responsibility, ensuring flexibility is exercised in a way that supports both individual staff and the wider school community.</p> <p>The Department believes that such guidance will help embed a culture of collegiality, shared understanding and mutual respect in schools, while providing Principals with clarity and assurance in managing arrangements fairly and consistently.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Guidance to be issued by the TNC to all schools by June 2026.</b></p>  |
| 4 | <p>Current guidance deploys the term reasonable in respect of the range of professional duties which a school-teacher may be required to perform. By way of exemplifying what might be viewed as “reasonableness”, in terms of an average working week for teachers and school leaders, the Panel suggests a range whereby an average of 35 hours per week, including DTB, over the school year should be viewed as reasonable, whereas a habitual average of 40 hours or more per week should be viewed as unreasonable. The Panel commends this approach to employers and Boards of Governors in exercising their legal duty of care to advise staff on the need to avoid an excessive workload culture in schools.</p> | <p>The Department recognises and agrees with the Panel that workload pressures are not evenly distributed across the school year and that time demands can vary depending on role, experience and circumstance. TNC will examine this issue as part of the upcoming Review of the Workload Agreement.</p> <p>The Department also accepts the Panel’s clear conclusion that, while an average working week of between 35 and 40 hours (including Directed Time and time spent preparing and marking off-site) may be considered reasonable, it would be unreasonable for an individual teacher to be habitually working an average of 40 hours or more per week across the school year.</p> <p>This articulation of reasonableness provides an important reference point for employers, Boards of Governors and school leaders in fulfilling their</p> |

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|   |  | <p>legal duty of care to staff. It sends a clear system-wide signal that excessive workload should not be normalised and that sustained overworking poses risks to wellbeing, retention and the quality of teaching.</p> <p>To give practical effect to these principles Boards of Governors will be reminded, as part of their duty of care for staff wellbeing, of the importance of actively avoiding an excessive workload culture in schools and of what would be considered reasonable in terms of average working hours over a school year. This will support more informed, consistent and responsible governance practice.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026</b></p> <p>TNC will develop and issue protocols for addressing sustained excessive workload, specifically where individual teachers are averaging over 40 hours per week over the course of a school year. These protocols will provide a clear, constructive route for early identification, discussion and resolution, reinforcing the principle that excessive workload must be addressed collectively and proactively.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By March 2027</b></p> |
| 5 | <p>Teachers whose schools have workload reduction strategies in place are significantly more likely to have positive views on the manageability of their workload, autonomy and job satisfaction. The thrust of this report is to create a framework for the promotion of collegial practice and professional dialogue. We recommend that all schools, either through a JCC or a collaborative working group, formulate an action plan for</p> | <p>The Department agrees that schools with clear, collaboratively developed workload reduction strategies are more likely to foster positive staff experiences, including improved perceptions of workload manageability, professional autonomy and job satisfaction.</p> <p>The Department is clear that collegial practice and professional dialogue are central to creating sustainable change in workload culture. Supporting schools to take a structured, collective approach to identifying and reducing excessive workload and unnecessary administrative tasks is therefore a key priority.</p>  |

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|                 | <p>reducing excessive workload and unnecessary administrative tasks.</p>  | <p>To enable this, the Department will facilitate a system-wide process that empowers school leaders and teaching staff to work together in a purposeful and constructive way to review current practice and agree practical actions for improvement.</p> <p>Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One Baker Day in the 2026/27 academic year may be designated to support a whole-school, collective discussion focused explicitly on reducing excessive workload and unnecessary administrative activity. This will provide protected time for meaningful professional dialogue and shared problem-solving.</li> <li>• TNC will provide supporting resources and materials to guide these discussions, helping schools to identify workload pressures, prioritise actions and develop clear, practical action plans tailored to their individual contexts.</li> </ul> <p>This approach reinforces the importance of collective ownership, transparency and trust, whether through a Joint Consultative Committee or other collaborative working groups appropriate to each school.</p> <p>The Department is confident that this focused, collegial approach will support schools to take meaningful action, reduce unnecessary burden and strengthen professional cultures in which staff wellbeing, autonomy and effectiveness are actively promoted.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By September 2026.</b></p> |
| <p><b>6</b></p> | <p>The report refers to the professional agency of teachers being diminished by excessive workload not directly related to teaching and learning, and</p> | <p>The Department is explicitly focussed on strengthening the professional status and agency of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland. It is a central focus of both this Action Plan and its TransformED reforms</p>   |

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|  | <p>by a lack of trust. We recommend that a premium is placed on empowering teachers and rebuilding the professional agency of the teaching profession in Northern Ireland. The Teacher Professional Learning (TPL) Fund and re-purposed existing school development days should focus on the full range of professional practices of teachers.</p> | <p>TransformED draws directly on international evidence showing that high-performing systems invest heavily in teacher expertise and continuous development, recognising that good teachers are the most important feature of a successful education system and that a strong professional learning culture is essential to raising standards.</p> <p>A key pillar within the TransformED strategy is significant investment in high-quality teacher professional development designed to strengthen the professional agency of teachers.</p> <p>Every teacher will have access to high-quality, meaningful professional learning that enhances their practice and empowers them as leaders of improvement.</p> <p>The Department's new strategy, <i>Leading Together for Excellence: A TransformED NI Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning</i>, outlines a coherent, deliverable plan for renewed investment in teacher professional learning.</p> <p>Together, the actions embody a coherent, ambitious vision which aims to enhance the status of the profession, strengthening its intellectual and economic foundations, and amplifying teacher influence across the system.</p> <p>Teachers are highly trained professionals who draw on their expertise, experience, and understanding of their pupils to make informed decisions about teaching approaches and support. Recognising and valuing the professional judgement of teachers is therefore fundamental to delivering high-quality education and securing the best outcomes for children and young people.</p> |
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|   |   | <p>Parents also have a vital role in supporting their children’s learning, and this support works best when it complements, rather than challenges, the professional decisions made in the classroom. Respect for teachers should extend beyond the classroom and into the broader expectations placed upon them. This includes recognising clear and reasonable boundaries around working hours, avoiding unnecessary escalation of concerns, or any form of abusive or intimidating behaviour. A culture of respect, civility, and proportionate engagement is essential if teachers are to focus on what matters most: high-quality teaching and learning for every pupil.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Ongoing</b></p>   |
| 7 | <p>The Panel endorses the steps being taken to streamline the system-wide administration requirements on schools; to support school leaders in rationalising administrative tasks; and to enhance the efficacy of communications to schools by the Department, the Education Authority (EA) and other relevant bodies. TNC should maintain an oversight in this area, with each body evaluating progress made and identifying further actions required.</p> | <p>School leadership is crucial to the success of high-performing education systems. Leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. Schools are rarely more effective overall than their leaders and poor leadership can undercut even the best teacher.</p> <p>The report from the Independent Panel noted that school leadership teams in Northern Ireland are increasingly required to carry out a volume of non-educational duties that extend beyond their core professional role as educational leaders. Some of these duties have expanded significantly over time, due to functions being devolved to schools without commensurate resourcing or specialist expertise. We will therefore take action to rationalise administrative demands and strengthen support so that schools are not left to manage these pressures in isolation. We want teachers and school leaders to be able to focus on teaching, learning and educational outcomes.</p> <p>In order to achieve this, for the 2026-27 school year we will fund the phased introduction of a cadre of administrative support for schools to test what works best in Northern Ireland. These will be senior administrative</p> |

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|   |  | <p>staff who may lead on matters such as complaints, FOI, GDPR, procurement and management of support staff without undermining the authority of the school leader.</p> <p>Reducing unnecessary administrative burdens and duplication is also critical to enabling school leadership teams to focus on their core purpose of leading teaching and learning. Streamlining requirements, aligning information requests, and eliminating duplication across the system will release valuable leadership time, reduce workload pressure, and support more sustainable, effective leadership.</p> <p>TNC will therefore establish a subgroup to monitor system-wide administration requirements, evaluate progress made and identify further actions required to reduce administration.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026.</b></p>   |
| 8 | <p>Based on our engagement with stakeholders and the results from the teacher and school leader questionnaire, the Panel is convinced that school principals require high-quality Human Resources (HR) advice and support in order to lead the work of the school in the context of whole school needs. The Panel recommends that employing authorities and relevant bodies are adequately resourced to expand their provision in this area.</p> | <p>School leaders need access to timely and effective HR guidance and advice to enable them to manage staff issues fairly, consistently, and with confidence, while minimising unnecessary administrative burden and personal risk. In the absence of such support, principals can become absorbed in managing employment matters in isolation, diverting time and capacity away from their strategic leadership responsibilities. Providing clear, accessible HR support will enable principals to make well-informed decisions that align staffing arrangements with pupil needs, school priorities, and workforce wellbeing.</p> <p>The EA has established HR and Communication Skills clinics for school leaders to listen to concerns raised by them and provide targeted advice and support. Workload issues identified through these clinics, along with the actions under consideration, will be shared with the TNC Sub-Group on workload to inform wider discussion, consideration, and dissemination.</p> |

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| 9  | In special school settings the current funding and management arrangements make it very difficult for a school leader to appoint appropriate HR administrative support, which would allow them to concentrate on the substantive work associated with leadership in their school. In this context, the Panel recommends that school leaders should have increased flexibility to manage and deploy human resources in a way that best meet the needs of their pupils and the specific context of their school. Further, the Panel supports the provision of targeted HR support in relation to the management of support staff in special schools. | <p>The Independent Review identified a particular challenge for leaders in special schools arising from the mixed model of delegated and undelegated funding. This approach has created difficulties in relation to the appointment, retention, and day-to-day management of staff.</p> <p>The Education Authority (EA) recognises the problems caused by this and is committed to addressing the issue. The EA is currently developing proposals for a new enhanced support model. Under these proposals, schools, including special schools, will have increased autonomy to determine how resources are allocated to best support children and young people with statements of SEN.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By September 2026.</b></p>   |
| 10 | We acknowledge that the workload concerns of teaching principals in nursery schools in terms of administrative demands are very real. The Panel recommends the facilitation of release time for principals in the nursery school sector.   | <p>The Independent Panel highlighted disparities in funded principal release time for nursery principals when compared with principals in small primary schools. While acknowledging that the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) cash value and classroom contact hours differ between these school settings, the Panel noted that the intensity of workload and administrative demands placed on teaching principals in nursery schools requires specific attention.</p> <p>A review of the Common Funding Formula (CFF) is being undertaken to ensure that school funding remains fair, transparent, and responsive to the evolving needs and pressures facing the education sector. This review provides an opportunity to assess whether resources are being distributed equitably across sectors and school types, and to ensure that funding arrangements support sustainability and the delivery of high-quality education across Northern Ireland.</p> |

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|    |  | <p>The administrative workload of nursery principals, along with potential measures to address these pressures, will be examined as part of the CFF review. The relevant Department of Education circular (DE 2008/17: Primary Teaching Principal Release Time) will be updated to reflect the outcomes of this process.</p> <p><b>Timescale: CFF review to commence in June 2026.</b></p>   |
| 11 | <p>The Panel fully supports the re-establishment of the 'Professional Qualification for Headship' and the development of the 'Professional Learning Programme for Existing, Experienced Principals'. We recommend that these programmes are informed by engagement with key stakeholders, including TNC.</p> | <p>The Department strongly welcomes and fully endorses this recommendation. The re-establishment of the Professional Qualification for Headship (PQH) alongside the development of a Professional Learning Programme for Existing, Experienced Principals represents a critical and timely investment in the leadership capacity of the education system.</p> <p>TransformED has committed to piloting a replacement for the former PQH during the 2026/27 academic year, and progress to date has been both positive and purposeful.</p> <p>The Department places a very high value on meaningful engagement with key stakeholders and supports the recommendation that programme design be informed through close collaboration with partners, including the TNC. This collaborative approach will ensure that the new qualification is credible, professionally grounded and responsive to the evolving realities of school leadership.</p> <p>The Department is clear that the re-established PQH must be a modern, high-quality qualification that reflects the complexity and significance of the Principal role. It is therefore particularly welcome that the new qualification will explicitly address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the realities of contemporary school leadership;</li> <li>• the increasing complexity and accountability of the Principal role;</li> </ul> |

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|  |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the central importance of strong instructional and pedagogical leadership;</li> <li>• values-based and ethical leadership;</li> <li>• the operational and administrative expertise required to lead schools effectively; and</li> <li>• system awareness and outward-facing leadership that contributes to wider improvement.</li> </ul> <p>The Department also strongly endorses the focus on experienced Principals as a vital and under-utilised asset within the education system. There is compelling evidence that systems are strengthened when experienced leaders are supported to sustain their effectiveness, mentor others, lead professional networks and contribute to system-level improvement.</p> <p>The new programme will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognise the breadth, intensity and demands of the Principal role;</li> <li>• support resilience, wellbeing and sustainable leadership;</li> <li>• deepen expertise in leading high-quality teaching and learning;</li> <li>• build capacity for mentoring, coaching and system leadership; and</li> <li>• provide structured opportunities for collaborative learning with peers.</li> </ul> <p>Again, in designing the Programme, we will liaise closely with key stakeholders, including TNC.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By December 2026</b></p> |
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| 12 | <p>We believe that TNC should negotiate, agree and implement guidance on the working patterns for school leaders. The guidance should be disseminated to school leaders and Boards of Governors who together should regularly review and ensure that working patterns are consistent with the guidance. A designated governor should be appointed in each school to act as a workload and wellbeing champion for principals and vice-principals.</p> | <p>The Department recognises the significant demands placed on school leaders and agrees with the Panel that coordinated, systematic action is required to address unsustainable workloads. It is committed to ensuring that school leadership roles remain both viable and attractive.</p> <p>Alongside the actions set out elsewhere in this plan to reduce administrative burden, the TNC will act as a central mechanism for the collection and dissemination of effective workload management practices, with the aim of preventing excessive and unmanageable workload.</p> <p>TNC will prepare and develop terms of reference for a Review of the Workload Agreement, which includes an examination of the working patterns of school leaders.</p> <p>To provide more immediate support, the Department will issue guidance to all schools recommending the appointment of a designated governor to act as a workload and wellbeing champion for school leaders.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026</b></p> <p>This will be supported by the development and delivery of guidance and training for Boards of Governors to ensure they are equipped to undertake this role effectively.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By January 2027</b></p> |
| 13 | <p>The Panel is of the view that planning for learning processes should support professional dialogue at school level rather than create an administrative burden for both teachers and principals. Accordingly, the Panel recommends that schools review their planning for learning procedures to</p>  | <p>The Department welcomes and fully endorses this recommendation. Planning for learning is a professional tool intended primarily to support teachers in delivering effective learning and teaching. It should be used for this purpose and should not generate unnecessary administrative burden for either teachers or school leaders.</p>   |

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|           | <p>ensure they are proportionate and support professional dialogue.</p>   | <p>A TNC working group is currently examining the workload implications and effectiveness of short-, medium-, and long-term planning approaches, alongside evaluation practices based on pupil observation within Early Years and Special Schools. On completion of this work, a communication will be issued to all schools setting out the findings and providing clear guidance on the way forward.</p> <p>This will ensure that planning processes promote meaningful professional dialogue at school level and support effective practice, rather than creating disproportionate or unnecessary workload for teachers and school leaders.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026</b></p>  |
| <p>14</p> | <p>The introduction of a new curriculum framework will require a significant investment in terms of teaching time and school resources in order for successful implementation to be achieved. We recommend that a full workload impact assessment of the changes should be conducted, and implementation should be appropriately resourced.</p> | <p>The Department strongly welcomes this recommendation and is clear that successful implementation of the new curriculum framework must be underpinned by careful planning, robust resourcing and meaningful support for schools and teachers.</p> <p>The new curriculum framework will be phased in over a three-year period from the 2028-29 academic year. This extended and deliberate timeline reflects the Department's strong commitment to supporting schools effectively and ensuring that implementation is manageable, well-sequenced and sustainable. It will provide schools with sufficient time to plan, build capacity and engage with the new framework well in advance of delivery.</p> <p>The Minister has been clear in making a firm commitment to resourcing high-quality support for implementation.</p> <p>In preparation for the introduction of the new curriculum, the Department will provide a comprehensive and coherent package of support, including</p> |

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|  |  | <p>clear guidance, high-quality resources and targeted professional learning and training. This will be complemented by ongoing, direct engagement with schools and key stakeholders, ensuring that support is responsive, practical and informed by professional feedback</p> <p>To provide clarity and assurance, the Department will publish a detailed implementation plan in Summer 2026, setting out the proposed support arrangements, resourcing and timelines to underpin the successful introduction of the new curriculum framework.</p> <p>A key objective of the new curriculum is to reduce unnecessary workload pressures on school leaders and teachers. Greater curriculum specificity, supported by high-quality resources and exemplar lesson materials, will bring clarity, consistency and confidence, enabling teachers to focus their time and energy on high-quality teaching and learning rather than curriculum interpretation and development.</p> <p>In recognition of the importance of workload considerations, the Department confirms that a full workload impact assessment of the curriculum reforms will be undertaken in line with TNC guidance.</p> <p>Overall, the Department views this recommendation as both timely and constructive and is confident that the planned approach characterised by phased introduction, high-quality support and close collaboration with the profession will enable the new curriculum to be implemented successfully and sustainably.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Ongoing from present</b></p> |
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| <p>15</p> | <p>A significant suite of reforms is being undertaken as part of TransformED. The Panel firmly believes that as well as the need for each project to have a workload impact assessment attached to it, it is imperative that an overview is developed as to how these projects are integrated, coordinated and resourced in order that schools and staff are not overwhelmed. The Panel therefore recommends that a strategic roadmap is developed to this end.</p> | <p>The Department strongly endorses this recommendation. TransformED represents a significant and ambitious programme of reform, and the Department is clear that success depends on reforms being carefully sequenced, well-coordinated and appropriately resourced, with a strong focus on ensuring schools and staff are supported at every stage.</p> <p>In recognition of this, a TransformED Implementation Roadmap was published and issued to all schools on 6 March 2026 (<a href="#">20260303 Milestones</a>).</p> <p>The roadmap provides a clear, system-wide overview of how the various elements of reform will be introduced and how the key strands -curriculum, assessment and qualifications - fit together. Notably, curriculum implementation will now begin in 2028-9 and will be phased over three academic years.</p> <p>Key elements of the timeline are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ September 2028: first implementation of new curriculum phased over three years</li> <li>○ September 2029: First teaching of new GCSEs</li> <li>○ September 2030: First teaching of new A levels</li> <li>○ March 2030: First new Year 4 Key Stage assessments in literacy and numeracy</li> <li>○ March 2031: First new Year 7 and 10 Key Stage assessments in literacy, numeracy and science.</li> </ul> <p>This deliberate pacing is designed to provide clarity, stability and confidence. By taking a measured, step-by-step approach, the programme will ensure that reforms are introduced in a way that supports teachers, protects professional learning time and allows schools to embed change effectively.</p> |
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|                  |   | <p>Workload impact assessments will be completed for all key reforms across curriculum, assessment and qualifications within the TransformED Programme in line with TNC Guidance. This will ensure that workload considerations are systematically identified, monitored and addressed at both project and programme level.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Strategic roadmap published in March 2026 and ongoing.</b></p>  |
| <p><b>16</b></p> | <p>Excessive tracking and monitoring at school level have been clearly identified as an administrative burden and generator of excessive workload. The Panel is firmly of the view that no more than three formal tracking points should be required over a school year and recommends that schools review their current practice to reflect this guidance.</p> | <p>The Department fully recognises that excessive tracking and monitoring can place an unnecessary administrative burden on schools and contribute significantly to workload pressures for teachers and school leaders.</p> <p>The Department is clear that assessment and tracking practices should be purposeful, proportionate and focused on supporting learning, rather than generating unnecessary data collection. In this context, the Panel’s guidance that no more than three formal, school-wide tracking points should take place during a school year provides a helpful and welcome benchmark for schools.</p> <p>To support this objective, the Department will issue clear guidance to all schools in advance of the 2026/27 academic year, explicitly reinforcing the expectation that formal tracking should be limited to a maximum of three school-wide points annually. This guidance will encourage schools to review and streamline existing practices to ensure alignment.</p> <p>The Department believes this will represent a significant step forward in reducing unnecessary workload, enabling schools to focus time and resource on high-quality teaching, responsive classroom assessment and meaningful professional dialogue, rather than excessive data capture.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026</b></p> |

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| <p>17</p> | <p>The Department has committed to investing in the upscaling and rollout of CCEA's computer adaptive assessments to inform effective formative and diagnostic assessments in schools. This CCEA programme has the potential to significantly reduce the teacher workload associated with summative assessment and pupil tracking in schools. In the light of this, the Panel recommends that schools should reassess and reduce their extensive use of commercial assessments and the high frequency of pupil tracking.</p> | <p>The Department strongly welcomes this recommendation and fully recognises the significant potential of CCEA's computer adaptive assessments, as well as the new framework for statutory assessment to support effective formative and diagnostic assessment in schools.</p> <p>Previous statutory Key Stage assessment arrangements, based on teacher judgement against Levels of Progression, were widely recognised as highly workload-intensive, particularly due to the scale and complexity of moderation requirements. Addressing these issues has been a central driver of recent assessment reform.</p> <p>The Independent Review of Statutory Assessment has proposed a new statutory assessment framework built around curriculum-aligned, standardised assessments, with auto-marking wherever possible. The resulting Statutory Assessment Pathway has been explicitly designed to minimise teacher workload while improving the usefulness, consistency and reliability of assessment information for classroom practice and pupil support. Under the new arrangements, Levels of Progression will be removed and replaced by the use of scaled scores, providing clearer developmental information with significantly reduced administrative burden.</p> <p>On 15 April 2026, the Department published its formal Response to the Independent Review of Statutory Assessment, alongside a new Policy Framework for Statutory Assessment. For the first time, this Framework establishes a clear and coherent assessment pathway from Year 1 through to Year 10, offering reliable, age-appropriate information at key points in a pupil's learning journey. It introduces a sequenced suite of short, low-burden assessments, auto-marked where possible, designed to assess core curriculum domains without narrowing teaching or encouraging excessive testing.</p> |
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|    |  | <p>The Department will continue to invest in and support the development and rollout of CCEA's computer adaptive assessments for literacy and numeracy. These assessments are available free of charge to all schools and are intended to provide a high-quality public alternative to commercial products.</p> <p>Over time, the Department expects and hopes that the availability of robust, curriculum-aligned, low-workload statutory and CCEA-developed assessments will significantly reduce schools' reliance on commercial assessment products and the need for high-frequency pupil tracking. As confidence in these tools grows, they should enable schools to streamline assessment practices, reduce duplication and focus professional time on teaching, learning and targeted pupil support.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Ongoing</b></p>  |
| 18 | <p>Regarding the current arrangements for controlled assessment, it is clear that certification is essentially dependent on the goodwill of teaching staff to mark internal assessments without, in all instances, adequate time being provided in DTBs or through informal TOIL arrangements. The Panel recommends that teachers either be afforded the time for marking or be paid for marking directly by the Awarding Body for the marking duties carried out on its behalf.</p> | <p>The Department recognises the workload impact of controlled assessment. Reducing unnecessary assessment burden is a central objective of the current programme of qualifications reform. There needs to be a significant removal or reduction in controlled assessment wherever possible across all qualifications.</p> <p>Currently, internal assessment places a burden on teachers, who must design, supervise, mark and moderate coursework. Removing non-essential components will reduce workload, give teachers back time to teach, and allow pupils to focus their energy on high-quality learning</p> <p>The new CCEA GCSE and A level specifications will remove controlled assessment and coursework wherever they are not essential. In subjects where practical skills must be directly assessed, such as Technology, PE and Art these components will be retained but streamlined.</p> |

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|    |  | <p>In the immediate term, TNC has issued guidance advising that Principals, in consultation with teachers, should take into consideration the workload and time requirements for the marking of controlled assessments.</p> <p>Directed Time may vary from week to week, reflecting the dynamic nature of school life and the demands of the academic calendar. This flexibility enables schools to respond to and plan ahead for specific events, priorities and operational needs without compromising the Workload Agreement - TNC 2024/2. For example, consideration should be given to the workload associated with assessment when managing directed time for staff whose examination classes have commenced study leave. Principals are encouraged to consider an adjustment to reflect the workload associated with examination preparation and controlled assessment / coursework throughout the academic year.</p> <p>To facilitate this, the Department will issue guidance permitting time for controlled assessment and associated marking and moderation to be provided through the flexible use of a School Development Day (SDD) annually.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Use of one School Development Day in 2026-7 and embedded in review of qualification specifications.</b></p> |
| 19 | <p>The Panel recommends that the EA develops a more robust framework to support schools in processing parental complaints, some of which may be vexatious. The emphasis should be placed on a proactive approach to supporting</p> | <p>The Department recognises the increasing pressure that complex, repeated or escalating parental complaints can place on schools, and particularly on Principals. The Department agrees that time spent managing poorly defined or vexatious complaints can detract significantly from core leadership responsibilities, undermine professional confidence and contribute to stress and workload pressures.</p> <p>The Department is clear that schools should not be left to manage such challenges in isolation. A proactive, supportive and consistent approach,</p>   |

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|           | <p>principals in resolving disputes rather than face escalation and prolongment.</p>   | <p>led at system level, is essential to enable early resolution of issues and to prevent unnecessary escalation or prolongation of disputes.</p> <p>During the 2026-7 academic year, the EA will develop and disseminate an updated model complaints policy for schools, which is in line with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) guidance. This policy will provide clearer structure, expectations and processes for handling complaints, including proportionate and robust mechanisms for managing complaints that are repetitive, unreasonable or vexatious. The aim is to ensure greater consistency and confidence for leaders in applying agreed procedures.</p> <p>By clarifying escalation routes and reinforcing the support role where appropriate, the revised framework will help reduce unnecessary workload, avoid prolonged disputes and protect valuable leadership time.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By December 2026</b></p>                    |
| <p>20</p> | <p>Coping with increasingly challenging pupils' behaviours is a core issue for teachers and school leaders. However, schools cannot be a substitute for diminishing support in critical social services. There is an onus on education authorities to support schools to have the capacity to deal with these issues effectively. The Panel recommends that an element of the TPL fund should be earmarked for bespoke training to support teachers in addressing the complexities of pupil behaviour in school.</p> | <p>The Department strongly welcomes this recommendation and fully recognises that supporting schools to respond effectively to increasingly complex and challenging pupil behaviour is a critical priority for teachers, school leaders and the wider education system. There is a need to ensure that DE Guidance and professional development reflect evidence-based, impactful approaches which will address this issue consistently and systematically.</p> <p>The Department agrees that schools cannot, and should not, be expected to compensate for diminishing support from other critical services. It is therefore essential that education authorities play an active role in strengthening schools' capacity to address behaviour in a way that is evidence-based, sustainable and supportive of staff wellbeing.</p> <p>In response to this need, the Department will designate addressing behaviour in schools as a key priority for the Teacher Professional</p> |

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|    |  | <p>Learning (TPL) Fund in the 2026-27 academic year. Schools will be required to set out clearly, within their TPL Fund applications, how they intend to use this funding to build staff confidence and capability in responding to behavioural challenges. This approach ensures that funding is explicitly targeted, while allowing schools the flexibility to commission training that reflects their specific context and needs.</p> <p>Alongside this, the Department will make a direct investment in a programme of high-quality professional learning during 2026-27 and 2027-8 academic years, including a suite of webinars and modular training focused on supporting teachers and leaders in managing complex pupil behaviour. These opportunities will be designed to be accessible, practical and relevant to classroom and whole-school practice.</p> <p>The Department will also develop and issue updated guidance for schools before the end of the 2026-27 academic year. This guidance will ensure consistency and clarity in expectations and will reflect evidence-based, impactful approaches to supporting positive behaviour, wellbeing and inclusion.</p> <p>Taken together, these measures demonstrate the Department’s clear commitment to prioritising behaviour support within professional learning, equipping teachers and leaders with the skills and confidence they need and ensuring that schools are not expected to manage these challenges in isolation.</p> <p><b>Timescale: 2026-7 Academic Year</b></p> |
| 21 | TNC are currently considering a ‘Preventing Violence at Work’ guidance document and hope to issue this to all schools in the near future. The Panel recommends that a public awareness | The Department recognises that exposure to challenging behaviour and violence, whether verbal or physical, is a significant contributor to stress, anxiety and reduced wellbeing for teachers and school leaders.   |

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|                  | <p>campaign is commissioned by the Department to highlight the detrimental impact of challenging pupil behaviour in schools and to stress a zero-tolerance approach to verbal or physical violence towards staff in all educational settings.</p>   | <p>The Department fully supports the work underway through the TNC on the development of updated Preventing Violence at Work Guidance and agrees that clear, consistent and proactive communication is critical in reinforcing expectations around behaviour and staff protection.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By June 2026</b></p> <p>Schools will also be explicitly reminded that TNC Circular 2011/2: Tackling Violence/Abuse against Teachers in Schools remains the statutory policy position for all schools. All employing authorities and schools are required to comply fully with the requirements of this policy, and its provisions will be reaffirmed as part of the wider communications to the sector.</p> <p>In line with the Panel's recommendation, the Department recognises the importance of public awareness and shared responsibility. 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 manner.</p> <p><b>Timescale: 2026-7 Academic Year</b></p> |
| <p><b>22</b></p> | <p>The Panel noted the Department's proposed SEN Capital Investment Programme and the need to transform the infrastructure supporting SEN learners and increase specialist provision in mainstream schools. In order to meet the increasing demand for SEN places, whilst also ensuring an equitable distribution of the associated workload, the Panel recommends that Specialist Provision in Mainstream Schools (SPIMs) should be distributed across all school sectors.</p> | <p>The Department welcomes and strongly supports this recommendation. The Education Minister has been clear about the urgent need to address and reform Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in Northern Ireland. Meeting the growing demand for SEN support requires a coordinated, cross-sector approach across the education system.</p> <p>In this context, the Department will continue to emphasise the importance of all grant-aided schools contributing to meeting the demand for school placements for children with statements of special educational needs.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Ongoing</b></p>   |

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| <p>23</p> | <p>Given the huge growth in Special Educational Needs (SEN) related workload that has been reported by teachers and school leaders throughout the period of our review, the Panel view it as imperative that action is taken to address this pressure. We therefore recommend that development of the Integrated Workforce Planning Framework (as part of the SEN Reform Agenda) should be used as an opportunity to re-assess the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to SEN.</p> | <p>The Department welcomes this recommendation and is clear that action should be taken to address the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to SEN support.</p> <p>The SEN Reform Agenda is a wide-ranging programme designed to transform how children and young people with SEN are identified, supported, and included across the education system. A Delivery Plan has been developed to drive this change, underpinned by a more child-centred and needs-based approach, reducing reliance on rigid processes or blanket interventions.</p> <p>The Reform Agenda includes a commitment to the development of an Integrated Workforce Planning Framework, intended to ensure a supported, valued, and highly skilled workforce that is equipped and empowered to create inclusive and supportive learning environments for pupils with SEN.</p> <p>As part of this, the demands placed on teachers and school leaders in relation to SEN will be examined through the Integrated Workforce Planning Framework. Actions to address identified pressures will be developed and implemented following completion of this review.</p> <p>An earmarked fund has also been established for SEN Teacher Professional Learning and SEN is fully embedded within the TransformED Teacher Professional Learning strategy.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By Spring 2027</b></p> |
| <p>24</p> | <p>We recommend that a working group be re-established by TNC to promote an employment model that facilitates greater flexibility in the redeployment of the education workforce.</p>  | <p>It is important that teachers in Northern Ireland who are seeking to transfer to a new school have a mechanism to submit such a request. A redeployment process for teachers would help support workforce retention, wellbeing and system flexibility. Effective redeployment</p>   |

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|    |   | <p>arrangements can help match teachers' skills and experience to schools with emerging needs, reduce disruption caused by prolonged vacancies, and provide a constructive option for teachers experiencing wellbeing or other challenges in their current post.</p> <p>TNC will develop protocols to facilitate redeployment of teachers who are seeking to transfer to a new school.</p> <p><b>Timescale: By December 2026</b></p>  |
| 25 | <p>Given the significant changes proposed by TransformED, it is essential that those developing and implementing new initiatives take cognisance of the specific demands placed on teachers and school leaders in Irish Medium Education (IME) schools. CCEA and the EA rely heavily upon the expertise of school leaders in IME for the production of resources and the quality assurance of curriculum and examination materials and should therefore take into account the increased demands placed upon those involved. We note that DE are currently developing an Irish-Medium strategy and action plan. The Panel recommends that the reduction in teacher and school leader workload particular to Irish Medium schools be prioritised in the key challenges to be addressed by the steering group.</p> | <p>The Department welcomes this recommendation and recognises that targeted action is required to address the specific needs of Irish-Medium Education (IME).</p> <p>The Irish-Medium Education Strategy will provide a strategic framework to support the sustainable growth and development of the IME sector. The Strategy will set a clear strategic direction focused on improving sustainability, workforce capacity, and educational outcomes for pupils, while ensuring that growth within the sector is planned, equitable, and sustainable across Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Workload pressures specific to Irish-Medium schools will be examined as part of the Strategy, particularly within the pillars relating to Educator Recruitment and Retention, and Teaching and Learning.</p> <p>Informed by research identifying key workload challenges for IME practitioners and school leaders, targeted actions will be developed and implemented to address these pressures and support the long-term sustainability of the sector.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Mid-2027</b></p> |

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| <p>26</p> | <p>The Panel considered in some detail the potential benefits that GenAI could deliver in terms of reducing teacher and school leader workload. We believe that developments in this area could have a significant impact on reducing excessive workload. We therefore recommend that the role of AI be factored into the planned refresh of technology and further that TNC should give consideration to the development of a strategic partnership approach to the role of AI in schools, with a particular focus on reducing teacher and school leader workload.</p> | <p>The Department strongly welcomes this recommendation and fully agrees that developments in Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) have the potential to transform professional practice in schools, with a particular and significant impact on reducing teacher and school leader workload. The Department is 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.</p> <p>In support of this ambition, the Department will invest over £10m through the EA to support the roll-out of system-aware generative AI tools, alongside high-quality professional development and training, over the next two years. A business case for the “GenAI for Teaching and Learning” project has been approved, and the project will formally commence in May 2026. This represents a major and forward-looking investment in workforce capability and system modernisation.</p> <p>Through this groundbreaking 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.</p> <p>An accompanying online learning platform will act as a central hub for this work, providing easy access to learning materials, recorded and live professional learning sessions, and guidance on best practice. The platform will also support the development of collaborative communities of practice, enabling schools and practitioners to share learning, innovations and effective workload-saving approaches.</p> |
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|  |  | <p>The Department recognises that GenAI offers substantial potential to reduce workload by automating or streamlining routine, low-value administrative and preparatory tasks. International research and emerging practice demonstrate that GenAI can effectively support activities such as lesson and resource planning, drafting feedback, summarising pupil work, managing documentation and supporting administrative tasks. This allows teachers and school leaders to focus more fully on high-quality instruction, professional judgement, pupil support and strategic leadership.</p> <p>The potential of GenAI has already been demonstrated in a Northern Ireland context through two proof-of-concept studies led by C2K, in partnership with Microsoft and Google. Findings from participating schools were highly encouraging and included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significant time savings, with an average reported workload reduction of 11 hours and 52 minutes per week per participant</li> <li>• 74.6% of participants reporting that GenAI use had already contributed to improvements in their wellbeing</li> <li>• 41.2% of participants reporting early improvements in pupil attainment, with a further 38.2% anticipating future benefits</li> <li>• Strong potential identified for supporting SEN provision and inclusive practice</li> <li>• Clear benefits in lesson creation, personalised support and automated feedback, with qualitative feedback highlighting substantial reductions in lesson planning time</li> <li>• Significant impact on school leadership and administrative workload, with almost half (48.7%) of reported time savings relating specifically to leadership and management tasks</li> </ul> <p>The Department agrees with the Panel that a strategic, partnership-based approach is essential to realising the full benefits of AI in education. It therefore welcomes the recommendation that the TNC give consideration to this area and sees clear value in collaborative engagement to ensure</p> |
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|    |   | <p>that the introduction and scaling of GenAI is focused on reducing workload, supporting professional autonomy and safeguarding staff wellbeing.</p> <p>Overall, the Department views GenAI as a major opportunity for system improvement, and this programme marks an important step in embedding innovation responsibly and at pace. Through sustained investment, professional learning and partnership working, the Department is confident that GenAI can play a transformative role in supporting teachers and school leaders and alleviating long-standing workload pressures.</p> <p><b>Timescale: From May 2026 onwards.</b></p>  |
| 27 | <p>The Panel noted the overwhelmingly positive response to the new framework for Inspection. The Panel is of the view that in pursuit of a change of culture across the school system, the extent of collegial practice in a school, as identified through inspection protocols, is worthy of comment in an inspection report. The Panel recommends that ETI consider how this might be accomplished.</p> | <p>The Department welcomes this recommendation. Over the past four years, the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has redesigned and transformed the inspection process. The development and implementation of the new inspection framework has been 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.</p> <p>The new ETI framework 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 will be recognised and reflected explicitly within published ETI inspection reports.</p> <p><b>Timescale: Ongoing</b></p> |

## **Monitoring, Evaluation and Governance**

This Action Plan sets out the actions and timescales required to deliver a sustained reduction in teacher and school leader workload. It brings together the recommendations of the Independent Review and the Heads of Agreement into a single, coherent programme of work.

To ensure momentum and accountability, the Department will establish a Workload Implementation Group, containing departmental officials and TNC representatives. As the enhanced TNC is established, it will play a central role in supporting the implementation of the remaining actions, ensuring that the voice of the profession remains central to delivery.

The Department will publish an annual report on progress in May 2027 to ensure full public transparency and accountability.

The actions set out here represent a significant commitment to teachers and school leaders. Their successful delivery will depend on continued collaboration, shared ownership and a collective determination, and sustained industrial peace across the education system to make this change a reality.