

UK teachers suffer increased workload as government plans to lengthen working day

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UK teachers are threatened with an extended work day in the next academic year. The government's post-Covid recovery plan is placing the burden of "catch-up" learning on already overstretched schools and teachers.

Ministers are considering two plans: A compulsory 30-minute extension of the school day—which would focus on academic catch-up—or an extension of the school day from 8am-6pm, with the extra time used for voluntary extracurricular activities.

Sir Kevan Collins, the education recovery commissioner, is leading the initiative, having said previously that teachers "will be asked to increase learning time for pupils as part of the catch-up effort." Arguing that a voluntary approach will not work, Collins favours a compulsory extension in order to "guarantee" that disadvantaged pupils attend.

Collins is no stranger to squeezing value out of public services. In his 2009-2012 role as chief executive of the Labour Party-run London Borough of Tower Hamlets, he implemented £50 million in cuts over three years.

Whatever plan is enforced on schools will intensify the exploitation of education workers, already exhausted by the government's schools policies since the beginning of the pandemic.

The government is utilising the coronavirus crisis to usher in long-planned education restructuring. This takes place amid an unprecedented increase in teacher workload related to the pandemic. In January, Prime Minister Boris Johnson cancelled A level and GCSE exams, but their replacement has put a huge burden on teachers.

Secondary school staff have been tasked with carrying out "assessments" to replace the cancelled exams for secondary pupils. Teachers have been placed under intense pressure and media scrutiny to carry out

the marking, moderation and awarding of teacher assessed grades (TAGs).

The "assessments" that have been introduced expose the government lie that pupils have been herded back into school for their own well-being. Pupils in Year 11 and 13 have been put under intense pressure to perform, with some reports of pupils having over 30 different assessments over a two-week period. After all that these children have been through over the past year, they are now brought back from lockdown to be assessed!

Teachers are assessing, standardising, marking and moderating "assessments" with no extra time given to undertake a role usually done by the exam boards. The Scottish National Party government in Holyrood have given teachers in Scotland an insulting one-off payment of £400 for the extra workload. Nothing has been forthcoming from Boris Johnson's Westminster government.

Last month, children's author Michael Rosen prompted a storm of against the prime minister after tweeting, "Dear Boris Johnson, You said that GCSE exams for this year were cancelled. They're not cancelled. They're called 'assessments'. And instead of examiners marking them, teachers are. For no money. But the schools have paid the exam boards. Where's the money?"

@SebsJoPatrick replied to Rosen "As a teacher; the time I am using to mark my year 11 assessments has an impact on the amount of time I have to plan engaging lessons for pupils lower down the school. Everyone is suffering through this. Any love for education is being eroded and it will just keep happening."

According to a YouGov survey released last week, a third of all teachers are planning to leave the profession in the next five years, and 16 percent in the next year.

The pandemic has compounded a longstanding teacher retention problem. According to the latest report from the Education Policy Institute, as of 2019 just two-thirds of early career teachers remained in the profession five years after they joined—down from 72 percent in 2010.

The cost of examination board fees also reveals the profits being made through the privatisation of the education system. If a school enters a large group of Year 11s sitting 10 GCSEs each, it is likely to cost the school between £75,000 and £100,000.

As a result, 2,000 headteachers have demanded a return of exam board fees. Headteachers say that the refunds—which would total around £220 million—would help fill the gaping holes in school budgets. The education sector has suffered a decade of funding cuts and been hit with countless extra costs related to the pandemic. The government has provided entirely inadequate additional funding and a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) found that 30 percent of Covid-related spending on education in England is due to come from existing budgets.

The National Education Union (NEU) have played down the extra work that secondary teachers have had to undertake this term, blocking teachers' demands for a fightback against intolerable conditions.

The union has limited itself to creating an FAQ page regarding issues of workload and well-being, conducting a survey of members and writing a meekly worded letter to Education Secretary Gavin Williamson calling for a token one-off payment for teachers. It states: "Marking assessment or evidence of student performance for grades has added an average 12 hours per week to the usual workload of teachers".

"We therefore urge you to offer teachers a one-off payment of £500 for their extra work relating to qualification grading."

Williamson has repeatedly declared war on teachers, working with the right-wing media to paint them as lazy. He organised the mass reopening of schools with deadly consequences, including threatening legal action against individual schools to keep them open during the winter surge. To appeal to this figure is an insult to education workers. The NEU's proposal also accepts the unmanageable demands being placed on teachers, in exchange for a pathetic £500.

Teachers on social media responded angrily to joint

NEU secretary Mary Bousted tweeting "Where is the recompense for teachers in England?"

@physics_jamie asked, "What is the unions stance on this exam fiasco? Teachers are performing the role of exam boards and getting nothing other than heightened stress and anxiety. If there was ever a time to stand up for teachers....."

@SiintheYate added, "I'll be honest, it's why I'm not a member. With respect to them, there's just too much posturing. Lip service. Nothing of substance."

Educators must draw the lessons. Bousted proudly declared at the 2021 conference that "teachers don't mind working hard. The profession already works the most unpaid overtime of any profession, with working weeks regularly exceeding 50 hours, and 55 hours for leaders."

The unions have formally condemned the increase in workload and the government's refusal to increase teacher's pay—meaning a real-terms cut—but are organising no action in response. They cannot claim they lack the resources. The education unions have around a million members between them and have vast sums of money sitting in their bank accounts.

Educators must take the struggle into their own hands. They must not allow their working conditions to be eroded any further and refuse any compulsory measures imposed on them by the government and the unions.

The fight against the pandemic, for a safe workplace, decent pay and conditions, and for a fully resourced education system based on scientific theories of child learning and development requires new organisations of struggle independent of the unions—a network of rank-and-file committees which work to unite workers across sectors and borders in a common struggle for socialism. We call on teachers, parents and students to take up this fight and join the Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee today.



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