English Teachers’ Workload

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Abstract: This paper reports on the findings of a study of 211 secondary school English teachers in New South Wales, Australia. The study aimed to gather data on English teachers’ work and lives, including their perspectives on workload, motivation, work satisfaction, wellbeing, and career intentions. In an educational environment dominated by a culture of ‘performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p. 216) manifested through the institutionalising of standards-based systems designed to codify, measure and judge teacher quality, the views and voices of teachers themselves are too often marginalised or absent from research and policy debates. In this paper, we represent English teachers’ perspectives on their work and lives and draw attention to the impact of an intensified workload on their capacity for quality teaching and continued investment in teaching as a career. The findings highlight a range of professional and situated factors (Day et al., 2006) experienced by teachers as a consequence of: administrative and accountability compliance demands associated with monitoring and reporting of teacher and student performance; high-stakes test preparation, associated data gathering, administration, and heightened expectations from the school executive, students, parents and the wider community; the speed of centralised curriculum change and policy reform; and diminished resources and support, including inadequate support for implementing new curriculum. The phenomenon of an intensified and excessive workload was perceived to be the single most determinant factor in impeding English teachers’ desire to focus on the ‘core business’ of teaching to their best. The paper calls for urgent attention to teacher workload and its far-reaching implications for quality teaching, student learning and the retention and support of high-calibre teachers in the profession.

It is evident that vastly increased administrative tasks are having a ‘blanketing’ effect across all types of schools, locations, levels of socio-economic advantage and staff teaching roles within schools, and severely threaten to overwhelm teachers’ professional focus on teaching and student learning. The extent and magnitude of the reported effects indicate underlying system-wide causes, and teachers widely attribute these to government policies and ongoing change initiatives. (McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey & Fitzgerald, 2018, p. 2)

Introduction
The current political discourses around the quality of teaching often rely on the narrative that effective teachers must live up to the heroic archetype of the selfless, dedicated, resourceful, and ever-resilient professional, regardless of the constraining professional and situated conditions of their work (Day, 2017). This narrative of the ‘good’ teacher tends to attribute the problems of workload stress, disillusionment, burnout and struggle to the personal shortcomings...
of the individual teacher (Schaefer, 2013, p. 265). It is a narrative that also inscribes the expectation that if the teacher, like Boxer in Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, were to simply ‘work harder’ (1945/2000, p. 25), the systemic challenges of teaching and learning would evaporate.

The working lives of Australian teachers, however, like those of teachers in many countries around the world, have undergone a marked transformation over the last two decades (Day, 2012, 2017; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2009; McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey, & Fitzgerald, 2018; Sachs & Mockler, 2012). In large part, this transformation has occurred as a result of what Ball describes as the culture of ‘performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Manifested through the institutionalising of standards-based systems designed to codify, measure and judge teacher quality, the culture of performativity has steadily redefined notions of teacher professionalism and narrowed the scope for teachers’ everyday enactments of agency and autonomy in the core business of teaching and learning (Ball, 2012; Day, 2017; Goodwyn, 2018; Gu & Day, 2007; Ryan et al., 2017; Sachs & Mockler, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011, 2017).

Elaborating on the impact of ubiquitous standards-based policy reform, Day (2017) identifies five inter-related consequences for contemporary teachers’ work and lives (pp. 6–7). He points to the benefits of some of these changes, such as greater opportunities for collaboration between teachers and schools, and the actual and potential affordances of digital technologies (p. 6). He also draws attention to the detrimental effects of other consequences on teachers’ professional identity, motivation, and ability to ‘teach to their best’ (p. xiii). One of these consequences has been the intensification of teacher workload, fuelled by the proliferation of administrative and bureaucratic tasks associated with system imperatives such as, for instance: the need for compliance in the standardised reporting and documenting of performance, including student performance (Brass, 2015; Kostogriz & Doecke, 2011; Lingard, 2010; Loyden, 2015; O’Sullivan, 2016; Ryan et al., 2017); and ‘increased pressures to meet the external demands of results-driven policies’ (Day, 2017, p. 2).

A focus on teacher workload in recent research has emerged as part of the broader concern relating to the recruitment, retention, wellbeing and support of ‘quality’ teachers (AITSL, 2016; Cross, 2015; Day, 2012, 2017; Day & Gu, 2014; Gallant & Riley, 2017; Mockler, 2011; NSW DEC, 2011b; OECD, 2013; Ryan et al., 2017) and in response to the rise of negative political and public discourses about teachers and their work (Farley, 2018). Internationally, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has conducted the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS) – ‘the first and only international survey that focuses on the learning environment and the working conditions of teachers in lower secondary schools’ (OECD, 2018, p. 3). In Australia, a number of similarly designed large-scale studies of the teaching workforce have incorporated data collection on teacher workload, perceptions of self-efficacy, and career intentions (McKenzie et al., 2014).

With two notable exceptions (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), there have been fewer recent studies designed to explore the context-specific working lives of teachers in individual Australian states and territories. Considering the variations between and within state and territory education jurisdictions in terms of school structure, staffing needs, student populations, socio-economic indices, teacher recruitment policies and student assessment and examination programs, a deeper understanding of the contours of teachers’ working lives may be gained from more finely-focused, ‘self-in-context’ (Mansfield, Wosnitza & Beltman, 2012, p. 32) studies. Such studies, including the study we report on in this paper, are predicated on the assumption that teachers are ‘active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thought and beliefs’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81). They are also geared towards learning more from teachers themselves about ‘the central role of workplace conditions’ (Day et al., 2007) in enabling or eroding teachers’ capacity and commitment.

When it comes to particular sub-groups of teachers within the profession, such as secondary English teachers, there exists little current research that provides up-to-date information from teachers themselves about the nature, distribution and perceived value of the tasks that constitute their workload. In NSW, secondary English teachers make up the largest cohort of subject specialists in the profession (NSW DoE, 2016). Potentially, they may experience an amplified version of performativity culture due to:

- their unique role in preparing *all* students for external, high-stakes tests and examinations in literacy and English;
implementing substantial curricular reforms at both junior and senior secondary levels; and
• carrying responsibility for the performance of all students in the only compulsory subject in the NSW curriculum from Kindergarten (Foundation) to Year 12 (the final year of schooling).

It is well understood that for teachers of ‘English and humanities (i.e. essay-based) subjects, the volume of work produced by learners is very high, so therefore this creates a large workload in terms of the time required to read and comment on the scripts submitted’ (DfE, 2018, p. 16). In addition, secondary English teachers in NSW (and all teachers in Australia) must now conform to standards-based policies and performance frameworks established and regulated by the Australian Institute for Teaching and Leadership (AITSL, 2011). In NSW, teachers’ work has also been influenced by state policies such as Local Schools, Local Decisions (NSW DEC, 2011a) and Great Teaching, Inspired Learning: A Blueprint for Action (NSW DEC, 2011b).

In the light of these national and state policy reforms, there has been no published study reporting specifically on current NSW secondary English teachers’ workloads. According to McGrath-Champ et al. (2018) ‘the intensification of teachers’ work is not being sufficiently acknowledged … [and] the research base in general is lacking a comprehensive understanding of what it is that teachers are already doing – not to mention their lived experience, and what they think of it’ (p. 8).

Their observation speaks directly to the purpose of this paper. Our intention is to report on selected findings from the first phase of a larger two-phase research study of 211 NSW secondary English teachers designed to elicit their views on a range of dimensions of their working lives. We concentrate here on exploring teachers’ responses to questions pertaining to their workload and its self-reported impact on their personal and professional lives, including any impact on their levels of motivation, health and wellbeing, job satisfaction, and career intentions.

Initially, the paper situates the study through a discussion of the relevant international and Australian research literature on teacher workload. It then addresses the researchers’ context, and the aim, purpose, research design, methodology and theoretical and conceptual framework informing the study. The methods of data collection and analysis are explained, with a descriptive overview of the sample and participants. The remainder of the paper sets out the results, foregrounding teachers’ comments about their workload and the perceived value, relevance and impact of the range of work tasks they undertake. We conclude with a synthesis of teachers’ perspectives and recommendations for addressing a number of key matters and implications arising from the findings.

An explicit goal of this study has been to represent the views and voices of teachers whose storied presence (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) in published research, scholarship and policy reform is either too often obscured beneath the presumed authoritative weight of statistical data, or simply absent. Almost 30 years ago, Goodson (1991) advocated for the need to ‘know more about teachers’ lives’ and to ‘assure that the teacher’s “voice” is heard, heard loudly, heard articulately’ (p. 36). For this reason, there is an emphasis in this paper on reporting the qualitative responses of secondary English teachers to a range of questions about their lived experiences of workload. In so doing, we seek to redress in some measure the ‘neglect of the teacher as a person [that occurs by] abstracting the teacher’s skills from the teacher’s self, the technical aspects of the teacher’s work from the commitments embedded in the teacher’s life’ (Hargreaves, 1994, p. viii). If the most salient influence on the learning and achievement of students is the teacher (OECD, 2018), then it is necessary to more fully understand the factors that determine their capacity for ‘teaching to their best and well’ (Day, 2017, p. xiii).

Background: Research and current understandings of teacher workload

It is not surprising that against the backdrop of prevailing policy discourses of ‘quality teaching’ and ‘teacher quality’ – coupled with the predominant ‘big data driven’ nature of educational reforms – there is a growing research interest in understanding the multifaceted nature of teachers’ workload and how this key aspect of their working lives influences their capacity for quality teaching and student learning. This interest is reflected internationally in the OECD’s TALIS initiative.

Including Australia, the number of countries participating in TALIS has grown from 24 in the inaugural study in 2008, to 34 in 2013, to over 45 in the current 2018 cycle (OECD, 2018). Based on the belief that ‘[e]ffective teaching and teachers, as well as strong school leadership, are key to producing high performing students’ (OECD, 2018, p. 5), the survey seeks to
gather internationally comparable information about teacher demographics, school systems, leadership, professional development and teacher practices and beliefs (McKenzie et al., 2014).

The snapshot of Australian (lower secondary) teachers’ workload showed that teachers ‘report working on average 43 hours per week, 5 more than the average for TALIS countries; they spend ‘similar numbers of hours per week on a variety of work-related tasks compared with the TALIS average. For example, teachers in Australia and other TALIS countries report spending 19 hours teaching per week, 7 hours planning and 5 hours marking’ (Freeman, O’Malley & Eveleigh, 2014, p. 3).

The TALIS data have been utilised by a number of countries in the development of their own national studies. In England, for example, the government has implemented a ‘programme of action to address unnecessary workload’ (Higton et al., 2017, p. 5) by undertaking biannual large-scale surveys and other research studies of teacher workload (Higton et al., 2017). The findings of these studies – both qualitative and quantitative – provide a source of longitudinal evidence based on teachers’ voices to inform policy and reform agendas in that country. Of note in the Teacher Workload Survey 2016 report (Higton et al., 2017) was that:

- The majority (93%) of respondents stated that workload in their school was at least a fairly serious problem; just over half of those surveyed (52%) cited workload as a very serious problem. This group worked an average of 57 hours in the reference week with 19 hours out-of-school time compared to 53 hours and 13 hours respectively for others.
- Over three-quarters of staff were dissatisfied with the number of hours they usually worked. Most staff disagreed that they could complete their workload in their contracted hours, had an acceptable workload and could achieve a good balance between their work and private life. Those who strongly disagreed with these statements again reported longer total hours, more hours working out of the regular school day and more additional hours beyond their contract (p. 9).

The qualitative strand of the Teacher Workload project (DfE, 2018) ‘gathered evidence of the factors that were reported to be associated with longer working hours, how teachers perceive their workload and how schools are seeking to address these issues’ (p. 3). From interviews with primary and secondary school teachers, the study found that the key drivers for increased workload were: administration (including the high volume of email workload); curriculum reform; data tracking; and marking and assessment (p. 3).

Such is the concern with teacher workload in England, and its consequences for the strength of the profession, student learning, and the retention of teachers, that the cumulative findings of the biannual Teacher Workload Survey and the subsequent collection of qualitative data have served to direct and maintain a high-profile focus on this issue and inform national policy agendas.

Research on Australian teachers’ workload

Although there is no Australian equivalent of the English Teacher Workload Survey, a number of national surveys provide useful insights into the general characteristics of the Australian teaching workforce and patterns of workload distribution. The most substantial of these is the Australian Government Department of Education’s Staff in Australia’s Schools (SiAS) survey (McKenzie et al., 2008; McKenzie et al., 2011; McKenzie et al., 2014). While TALIS gathers data only from lower secondary school teachers, the SiAS surveys capture information from primary and secondary school teachers, executives and principals across the country’s education sectors.

The SiAS survey in 2013 (McKenzie et al., 2014) included the responses of 10,349 secondary school teachers. Secondary school teachers reported an average workload of 47.6 hours per week, made up of:

- 20 hours of face-to-face teaching;
- 11–12 hours of marking, planning and preparing; and
- 7 hours of administration (p. 50).

The report notes that a weekly workload of 49.4 hours for secondary teachers in NSW is higher than the national average (p. 50).

When compared with the Australian TALIS findings, the SiAS findings reveal a number of correspondences and discrepancies. In terms of workload, the SiAS 2013 data indicate an average weekly workload of 47.6 hours (49.4 for secondary teachers in NSW), whereas in the TALIS data gathered in the same year (2013) the average is 43 hours. In both studies, the average age, gender balance, length of teaching experience and face-to-face teaching hours are consistent. These figures do not, however, provide a breakdown
of the time teachers typically spent outside of the required weekday working hours on teaching-related or other tasks associated with their role.

The recent Victorian School Staff Workload Survey (SSWS) (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) offers a more fine-grained analysis of teacher workload and workload distribution through data collected from more than 13,000 Victorian primary and secondary school teachers and principals. For secondary school teachers in Victoria, the average reported workload was 52.9 hours per week, almost 10 hours more than that reported in the TALIS 2013 report. Time spent on teaching and teaching-related activities accounted for 76 per cent of the workload for the whole sample, with the remaining 21 per cent spent on other work activities. Secondary teachers reported spending an average of six hours during their weekend on work-related tasks (pp. 8–9). When asked about their perception of workload, only 'about one fifth of teachers' thought that their workload was 'often or nearly always manageable' (p. 38). Almost one quarter of secondary teachers reported that their workload was 'never/seldom' manageable (p. 39). An additional significant finding was that

[around 90 per cent of teachers indicated that their workload at some stage has had a negative effect on the quality of their teaching. Just over one third of teachers in all schools indicated that their workload often or nearly always adversely affected their health ... About one third of teachers regularly think about leaving the teaching profession (p. 10).

The context-specific nature of this Victorian-based study provides more precisely calibrated findings, illustrating in greater depth the complexity, context-specific nature and impact of workload on teachers in this one Australian state.

Similarly, the recently-published Understanding Work in Schools: The Foundation for Teaching and Learning (UWSFTL) (McGrath-Champ, Wilson, Stacey & Fitzgerald, 2018), commissioned by the NSW Teachers Federation, reports on a large-scale study of more than 18,000 NSW public school teachers. This significant project set out to gather data on: the teaching and learning and other activities currently undertaken in schools; teachers’ perspectives on their workload and whether or not it has increased in volume and complexity over the past five years; their judgements about the value and relevance of the tasks they undertake; the impact of changes to their workload; and their suggestions for redressing declining systemic support for teaching and learning (p. 10).

The authors of the report note that:

This almost unanimous reporting in relation to increases in workload indicates a common experience at levels rarely encountered in social science research, where variance usually abounds ... The particularly resounding changes in administrative workload were felt across all school locations – metropolitan, provincial and remote or very remote (p. 53).

In the face of ‘resounding changes in administrative workload’, the report also highlights teachers’ efforts to ‘preserve their work that is most focused on students’ (p. 43), yet ‘many teachers are suffering from the additional demands and feel frustrated that these distract them from their work with students’ (p. 43). The key findings of the report resonate with those of the Victorian School Staff Workload Survey (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) in terms of teachers’ working hours, the growing time-demands and complexity of their workload, the extent to which compliance and other ‘time consuming, cumbersome’ (p. 43) administrative tasks are encroaching on teaching and learning, and the personal and professional consequences of these for teachers and students.

This most recent, comprehensive portrait of NSW public school teachers’ working lives contributes further evidence to support the calls for urgent policy reform. The authors argue that rather than enabling quality teaching and learning, NSW Department of Education policies such as Local Schools, Local Decisions (NSW DEC, 2011a) have in fact undermined the scope and potential for quality teaching and learning: systemic support has dwindled as responsibility for educational outcomes has been shifted to individual teachers and schools, ‘leaving the state to remotely monitor and control’ (Stacey, 2017, p. 790).

The present study

Researchers’ context

In undertaking this research with secondary English teachers, we understand that such a process is inevitably shaped by our own histories, values and worldviews. As university teacher educators with a background as secondary English teachers, Heads of English, Chief Examiners of NSW Higher School Certificate English examinations1 and NSW Board Inspector of English,2 we are biographically situated and invested in a distinct interpretive community (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 48). We bring to this research a set of beliefs about English as a subject, and about teaching and learning...
that rests on a relativist ontology and interpretive epistemologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, pp. 58–59). Our work with teachers is also driven by a belief in the primacy of language in shaping, making sense of and conveying experience. This background thereby positions us not only as co-participants as we seek to mediate, interpret and represent the perspectives of teachers in this study (Creswell, 2013, p. 32), but also as advocates for English teachers’ perspectives, English teaching and student learning.

**Methodology**

Guiding the research design was an interpretivist paradigm based on constructivist-subjectivist presuppositions (Creswell, 2013). This paradigm embraces the concept of multiple realities that are made and remade through subjective, language-based, context-bound and temporal constructions of meaning. Since the study is located in the tradition of phenomenological research, we were therefore concerned with representing the multiple realities of participants through the inclusion of the voices of the teachers themselves, communicated through written responses (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

**Theoretical and conceptual framework**

In designing the study, we have drawn on the theoretical and conceptual framework developed by Day et al. (2006) in their study of the work and lives of 300 primary and secondary school teachers in England reported in *Variations in Teachers’ Work, Lives and Effectiveness* (VITAE). The study has been subsequently elaborated by Gu and Day (2007, 2013) and Day (2017). In the VITAE study, the influences on teachers’ work and lives are theorised in terms of the interactions of three dimensions of their professional identity as it is shaped by ‘combinations of factors embedded in the individual, relational and organisational conditions in which they work and live’ (Gu & Day, 2013, p. 29).

The first of these is the *professional* dimension, which encompasses:

- the influence of external systems;
- social and policy expectations of the ‘quality teacher’;
- a teacher’s ideals and values; and
- professional life phases.

The professional dimension ‘is open to the influence of long term policy and social trends as to what constitutes a good teacher ... It could have a number of competing and conflicting elements such as local or national policy, CPD, workload, roles and responsibilities’ (Day et al., 2006, p. 147).
4. three conflicting dimensions (for 6 per cent of teachers in the study) (p. 153).

Teachers experiencing Scenarios 2, 3 and 4 were found to be most at risk in terms of their motivation, commitment, resilience and wellbeing (p. xiii). For the purposes of the study of NSW English teachers’ workload, the VITAE (2006) model thus afforded an established and validated theoretical and conceptual framework to inform the research design and interpretation of data.

**Methods**

**Data collection**

The initial phase of the study involved the development of a 28-item questionnaire. During 2017, secondary English teachers in NSW were invited to participate in the study on a voluntary, anonymous basis by completing the online, structured questionnaire, accessed through the state English Teachers’ Association closed social media group. Since participants in the study represent a non-random, convenience sample and there are recognised limitations of the questionnaire as an instrument, the findings cannot be generalised (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

The questionnaire drew on and adapted the validated survey instruments utilised in the Australian SiAS research studies (McKenzie et al., 2014), the Victorian School Staff Workload Survey (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), the VITAE project (Day et al., 2006), and the Teacher Workload Survey 2016 (Higton et al., 2017). The first nine items of the questionnaire sought demographic and profiling information about the participant’s gender, age, length of service, current role, school postcode/setting, employment status, subjects taught and highest qualification. The remainder of the questionnaire contained items organised according to the broad themes derived from the model of teachers’ work theorised by Day et al. (2006):

1. Self-efficacy, agency, professional beliefs and values.
2. Workload and working conditions.
3. English curriculum reforms, policy changes and regulatory requirements.
4. Wellbeing, satisfaction with teaching, and career intentions.

Items formatted as multiple choice questions allowed for internal multiple responses. Most of these question types were based on a Likert rating scale, with the option of ‘other’ responses and an open field.
for comments. Items inviting written comments were open field and not word-limited. The collection of quantitative and qualitative data was considered to be productive for the exploratory, inductive nature of the research, since ‘numbers and words are both needed if we are to understand the world’ (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 42) of teachers’ work and the ways in which they make sense of their lived experiences. Phase Two of the study has been designed to build on Phase One by gathering further qualitative data through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. The findings of this second phase will be reported on separately, at a later date.

**Sample and participants**

In the research sample of 211 secondary school English teachers from 191 schools across NSW, 181 participants were female, 29 were male and one identified as non-binary (female/male). Twenty-six per cent of the participants can be categorised as early-career teachers with teaching experience of up to five years. Teachers with more than 5 years’ teaching experience made up 70 per cent of the sample. The average age of the group was 47 years, with an average length of time teaching of 18 years. Of the 211 participants:

- 64 per cent were classroom English teachers (85 per cent full-time and 11 per cent part-time) in a secondary school;
- 30 per cent were Heads of Department of English;
- 2.8 per cent were casual teachers; and
- the remaining participants were either retired, or in school-based leadership, co-ordination or other executive roles.

Notably, 60 per cent of the sample held an Honours, Masters or PhD degree.

**Data analysis**

In keeping with the research design, theoretical and conceptual framework, and methodology, qualitative data in the form of participants’ written comments were analysed inductively, iteratively and recursively. An average of more than two-thirds of participants provided written comments in questions containing an open field, and some of these comments were extensive. The volume of written responses can be taken as an indicator of teachers’ engagement with the issues raised in the questionnaire and their interest in voicing their perspectives. Due to the complexity of the data, the research questions focusing on a typical workload for a full-time teacher, and limitations of space, only the responses from full-time classroom teachers (including Heads of Department with a teaching load) are explored here.

The initial coding of responses from teachers evinced a number of themes, which were then utilised to collate sub-categories allowing for closer semiotic analysis and interpretation (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 10). Hermeneutic textual analysis of individual’s written responses enabled a multiplicity of ‘readings’ and the subsequent identification of themes, sub-themes, and patterns of meaning emerging from teachers’ situated perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). When the coding, analysis and interpretation were conducted on each question with an open field, a range of written comments in each thematic category was selected as representative of the set of responses in each question. Responses to quantitative items in the questionnaire were analysed for general trends and descriptive participant profile information. Where appropriate, quantitative results are provided in order to indicate the proportion of teachers who chose to provide written comments.

**Results**

The following sections focus on the responses of participants to questionnaire items related to their workload.

**Workload and workload distribution**

In order to determine the nature and time-demands of NSW secondary school English teachers’ work, Item 10 of the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate the time spent on a range of activities in a typical working week. A number of these broad categories of activities – such as, for example, those related to meetings, administration and professional collaboration and learning – included sub-categories intended to draw out more nuanced information about the nature of those activities. Participants were also asked to indicate the time spent on work-related tasks on an average weekend.

**Average workload**

The findings showed that the average workload for teachers in this sample with a regular teaching load was 58 hours per week, with a portion of this total work time occurring on weekends for a large majority of full-time classroom teachers and Heads of Department. The activities in these teachers’ workloads and the average amount of time per week spent on each activity are summarised below.
Face-to-face teaching
As expected, the most significant reported time commitment was for face-to-face teaching, with 81 per cent of classroom teachers spending between 15 and 27 hours per week engaged in this work. The average face-to-face teaching time for classroom teachers in the sample was 20.5 hours. A number of participants commented on the intensification of aspects of their workload that were not directly related to teaching and learning, and the impact of this on their capacity for high quality teaching and commitment. Representative of the concerns expressed by other classroom teachers were comments made by an experienced teacher about the changing nature of her working life:

I have been a teacher for 15 years. In the last 4 or 5 years, I have worked harder, and longer hours, than I did in my first year. The job has changed. I love my kids, and I love the basic premise of this job – guiding kids into the world through literature – but time, funding, expectations, constant changes are all affecting my ability to teach with the energy and positive attitude needed (F, 10+).

Planning and preparation directly related to teaching and learning
Almost half of classroom teachers reported spending three to nine hours per week on planning and preparation directly associated with teaching and learning. For 32 per cent of teachers, a typical week consisted of between 9 and 15 hours of planning and preparation. Almost 10 per cent reported undertaking 19 or more hours of preparation per week to support their face-to-face teaching. Within this 10 per cent, there was a large representation of early-career teachers. One teacher’s comments reflected the content of other teachers by highlighting the pressures associated with juggling the demands of teaching-related activities: ‘My preparation and marking take up most of my time. Every week, I have to prioritise what it is I am going to focus on, which is stressful. The workload is relentless and endless’ (F, 10+).

Meetings
The average amount of time spent on staff meetings and other meetings with colleagues was three hours. Around one fifth of classroom teachers reported spending between three and five hours per week in these kinds of meetings. Staff meetings were typically devoted to operational and school/department policies and administration matters. The meetings were generally not occasions for curriculum development activities, professional learning or other teaching-related collaborations directly connected to teaching and learning.

Marking
After face-to-face teaching, the marking of student work figured as the second most significant component of English teachers’ workload directly related to teaching, with 53 per cent of classroom teachers allocating 5 to 9 hours per week to this task. Almost one fifth of teachers spent more than nine hours per week marking student work. A number of teachers highlighted the cyclical nature of their marking workload, confirming that the hours spent on marking increased at certain peak points during the school year such as assessment, examination and reporting periods. As one teacher remarked, ‘These times change throughout the year. During musical time, reporting periods, senior marking, these hours double if not triple’ (F, EC).

Extra-curricular commitments
The average amount of time spent on extra-curricular activities (such as, for example, school sport, debating, and drama) was two hours per week. In addition to their classroom teaching, 73 per cent of teachers reported that they spend up to 5 hours per week engaged in extra-curricular activities with their students.

Professional collaboration, learning and engagement
A snapshot based on the highest frequency ranges showed that English teachers spent an average of one to three hours per week engaged in professional collaboration and professional reading. Of note is the finding that 53 per cent of classroom teachers in the sample engaged in curriculum development for between 1 and 5 hours per week. More than a quarter reported spending more than three hours per week on this endeavour. This finding may reflect the fact that at the time of the survey, the new senior secondary syllabus had recently been released, thus requiring teachers to devote additional time to redesigning existing, or developing fresh, teaching programs. Many teachers drew attention to the impact of constant reform and ever-increasing situated expectations on their motivation, resilience and ability to ‘teach to their best and well’ (Day, 2017, p. xiii):

I love teaching but it is overwhelming and it has affected my mental health … Every year the workload increases, the behaviour worsens and the support diminishes.
Am giving myself another two years and then I think I’ll be out. I love it; I am a generally very well-liked teacher and I am getting good results, but I didn’t sign up to be a slave … who works for free out of school hours, every single day. I’m a smart professional who is successful at my job, and I deserve to be taken seriously and I deserve to be adequately compensated for my time (F, MC).

Administration
Administrative tasks directly related to teaching (emails, data collection, reports, individualised student monitoring and programming, performance auditing, and paperwork associated with activities such as excursions) accounted for a substantial proportion of teachers’ workload. More than half of the sample reported spending up to five hours in a typical week on these tasks. Nineteen per cent reported spending between five and nine hours per week on teaching-related administration, with sixteen per cent of the sample spending more than nine hours in a typical week on this work.

Administration directly related to meeting external regulatory requirements such as teacher performance and accreditation contributed to the weekly workload of 72 per cent of English teachers with 21 per cent indicating that these tasks absorbed an additional one to nine hours per week. One experienced teacher’s perspective on this aspect of her workload was representative of the views expressed by many others in the study: ‘Too much administration detracts from teaching and the love of the job. The number of hours required to merely sustain the role is destroying my family life and my stress levels are usually quite high’ (F, 10+).

Combining the average time spent on administration directly related to the teaching role in a school with the average time spent on administration related to compliance with external regulatory policies, classroom teachers spent an average of between eight and twelve hours on administration during a typical school week and weekend.

Engagement with students and parents
Pastoral care of students, individual student consultations and engagement with parents added between one and five hours to the workload of 66 per cent of teachers. For 12 per cent of teachers, the pastoral care of students consistently required more than 5 hours per week. For 97 per cent of the sample, the average time spent on communication and other forms of engagement with parents was 1 hour per week. Some teachers addressed this dimension of their work, and the underlying pressures and adverse consequences associated with some parental and broader societal attitudes:

We are time-poor, overwhelmed by the external pressures attached to our roles, and are frustrated by the lack of resources, lack of support from parents in general, many of whom do not value education at all, as well as the erosion of our status in society. The money doesn’t matter. Most teachers just want to feel respected for their efforts in trying to make differences in their students’ lives (F, 10+).

Weekend work
Item 11 of the questionnaire asked teachers to indicate the amount of time they spend during a typical weekend on work-related tasks. For a majority of teachers (96 per cent), the workload activities that could not be completed during the school week were undertaken on weekends. More than 54 per cent reported spending 5 hours or more on a typical weekend with around 20 per cent of these teachers frequently spending more than nine hours each weekend on work-related tasks. As one teacher remarked, ‘I cannot think of a single weekend I have not done school work, in almost ten years of teaching’ (F, MC). Another commented that ‘sometimes I’ll spend 15 hours in a weekend giving feedback to students, sometimes 1–3 hours doing admin and lessons for the next week’ (M. EC). Teachers also acknowledged the spikes in marking that occur during assessment, examination and reporting periods, noting that the amount of weekend work time depends on these fluctuations throughout the school year: ‘If marking or during report season it could be 16+ hours (of weekend work). If not, far less’ (F, MC).

Professional and situated factors contributing to the intensification of teacher workload
Teachers identified a suite of professional and situated factors associated with systemic policy, funding and reform agendas that they believe have contributed to their escalating workload. The most frequently cited factors were those over which teachers felt they had little or no control and agency and included:

- administrative and accountability compliance demands associated with monitoring and reporting of teacher and student performance (both internally within the school and department, and
externally through regulatory and other bureaucratic policies;  
- high-stakes test preparation, associated data gathering, administration, and heightened expectations from the school executive, students, parents and the wider community;  
- the speed of centralised curriculum change and policy reform; and  
- a lack of resources and support (both material and human), including inadequate support for implementing new curricula.

These themes and the tensions evident between the rhetoric of policy and the realities of day-to-day teaching were well-articulated by an experienced teacher:

As much as I love being in the classroom, the amount of time it takes to teach well and cope with all the extra jobs that exist in the school is getting to me and there doesn’t seem to be an end in sight. We’re also becoming hugely data driven, and although I know data is important, the tests we are running just don’t seem to fit the ideals of ‘21st Century learners’, which every educational body espouses. Creativity doesn’t seem to be high on the agenda anymore. I do still love teaching English when I’m in the room with the kids though. It’s just getting to the room that’s tough (F, MC).

More than 83 per cent of teachers named the aspects of their work that they believed were adversely affected by these externally-driven professional and situated factors, including:

- planning and preparation for teaching;  
- providing quality feedback to students;  
- scope for reflexive practice;  
- creative/innovative teaching and risk-taking; and  
- formal and informal professional learning, professional dialogue and school-based collaboration.

Consequences of intensification of teacher workload

Sustained commitment to teaching

Of the 110 teachers who commented on their working lives in terms of their levels of motivation and commitment, 30 affirmed their continued passion and altruism with comments such as: ‘My passion for teaching has grown throughout my career’ (F, 10+). ‘I still want to make a difference’ (F, 10+); and ‘I am still passionate about literature and learning and thinking and hope to pass that on to students’ (F, 10+). A number of teachers pointed to the enabling influence of supportive colleagues and leadership (situated factors) as a crucial factor in sustaining their commitment to teaching:

I have been fortunate to work in an intellectually stimulating environment with a diverse range of students – because this environment has been supportive, I feel that I have been able to live up to my goals (F, 10+).

I have worked with supportive and caring staff who have a strong vision. The schools also had strong vision and leadership that supported teachers. I have weathered the highs and lows of teaching because of these and the feeling that I am making a difference in the lives of some of my students (F, 10+).

In tension: commitment to teaching, workload pressures and work-life balance

A further 90 teachers, however, identified tensions in the professional and situated factors that impact their work as English teachers. They expressed frustration that the work they regarded as their core business was increasingly compromised as they struggled to cope with the burgeoning nature of their workload beyond face-to-face teaching. They volunteered extensive written elaborations related to the toll workload pressures have taken on their personal and professional lives, motivation and aspirations. Many teachers echoed the perspective conveyed by one teacher in in terms of the disjunction between the desire to teach to their best and the exigencies of a workload that has incrementally prevented some from sustaining this goal:

The dream and aspirations of teaching versus the reality differ greatly. Between juggling the ever-daunting administration duties in conjunction with the polymathic demands of the profession and the act of delivering and planning content, there is no time to breathe. We’re drowning (M, EC).

From an analysis of written comments, a cluster of prominent themes emerged around the impact of workload on the teacher’s personal and professional lives, including:

- the emotional labour of being a teacher (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 838; Lo & Liew, 2016);  
- work-life balance issues, including impacts on health and wellbeing;  
- fatigue, burnout or concerns about burnout;  
- lack of respect for and support of classroom teachers’ work;  
- reduced time, systemic support and funding for professional development;  
- flagging levels of motivation;
- diminished levels of resilience; and
- ambivalence about their continued role in the profession.

One teacher’s response encapsulated the interdependent nature of these themes, expressing the flow-through effect of intensified workload on her personal and professional life:

Maintaining motivation about teaching has been difficult. I still love teaching teenagers and enjoy my subject; however, I do feel overwhelmed. My work-life balance is terrible. I let my own children down all the time and often prioritise my students. I have become cynical about examinations and structures, believing that it is impossible to teach well in our current policy-driven environment (F, 10+).

Similarly, an experienced teacher voiced a common theme that ‘the lack of time means we are frazzled, running from class to class, never doing anything as successfully as we’d like’ (F, 10+). Another observed that the ‘changing nature of the job makes me constantly reconsider why I’m still doing it. The opportunity to bring a love of literature and the world to kids still exists, but I feel that external factors are making it harder and harder’ (F, 10+). The impact of an intensified workload on a teacher’s professional identity and perceived self-worth is further illustrated by an experienced teacher’s reflection on the state of her working life:

Currently I am in constant flux regarding my feelings of worth in being a teacher. There are some good days, but others that are extremely overwhelming and depressing. The thought of facing a new syllabus next year, requiring a whole new direction/resources/texts etc is, quite frankly, really daunting. I am worried about the time-frame to prepare adequately and feel confident … Every text I currently teach and have numerous resources for is no longer on the list so I must start from scratch AGAIN! (F, 10+).

When asked to indicate the extent to which their health and wellbeing were affected by their workload as teachers, more than 80 per cent of classroom teachers believed that their health and wellbeing were to varying degrees deleteriously impacted by their increasing workload. Of this group, 48 teachers expanded on their responses through written comments, often sharing candid reflections that revealed a troubling pattern of physical and psychological struggle:

I know I have no work-life balance. My personal and family life has suffered because of the demands of this job. In order to survive in a classroom in which we have to cater for students with quite diverse needs, feeling that we have to exceed the expectations of a society which does not value teaching or education, and just simply keep up-to-date with the constantly changing nature of curriculum and teaching methodologies, means that we are generally overworked. I never thought I would say this, but I will be very pleased to see my retirement days be realised (F, 10+).

In this vein, the themes of frustration, exhaustion, and depleted levels of morale were pronounced in 52 teachers’ comments in relation to the issue of burnout. These teachers described either a state of burnout or serious concerns about the potential for burnout for themselves and/or colleagues: ‘I am very concerned and worried [about burnout] having watched several people leave the profession for this reason’ (F, EC).

Work satisfaction and career intentions
This was the focus of Item 24 of the questionnaire, with just over 46 per cent of classroom teachers reporting that they were ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with their work as teachers. Of this group, 31 teachers volunteered written remarks expressing that they ‘love teaching’, while qualifying this with a ‘but’: ‘I love teaching, but am overwhelmed by the constant demands of the job and how much work I need to do in order to even attempt to meet the varying needs of my students’ (F, EC); ‘I love what I do, but I am so tired’ (F, 10+); ‘I still love it, but the admin and expectations make me sad. It’s hard to even eat lunch in peace and that is not healthy’ (F, 10+); and ‘I still love kids and literature and the teaching aspect of my job, but the excessive paperwork and extra required work is exhausting’ (F, 10+).

We draw attention to the very high written response rate to matters of health, wellbeing and burnout in order to underline that for almost a quarter of teachers, the constraining professional and situated dimensions of their work have dominated that work to the extent that they have, or continue to, negatively impact(ed) on the teachers’ personal lives and motivation to teach.

Around 10 per cent of teachers were ‘unsure’ about whether they were satisfied with their work, and a further 25 per cent were ‘unsatisfied’ or ‘very unsatisfied’. The percentage of negatively rated responses to this question were consonant with the proportion of teachers who expressed concerns about their motivation, health, wellbeing, and burnout in an earlier question. Repeatedly, however, these teachers spoke of their unswerving dedication to their students as the
overriding ‘pull’ factor in their ongoing commitment to teaching: ‘I love the job, but I’m dissatisfied with the external issues. I have considered leaving, but the kids keep me coming back’ (F, 10+); ‘I stay because of the students, not the shifting climate’ (F, MC); ‘This is not a black–white answer. I know I am a great teacher, and I know I make a difference in students’ lives but it is an incredibly stressful job with little financial reward and is taking a toll on my mental health and my family’s wellbeing’ (F, EC).

Teachers who reported greater levels of dissatisfaction with and ambivalence about their work also expressed the intention to exit teaching prematurely, or had considered this option. As one teacher observed, ‘I’m unsure that I will continue teaching. I do not believe that teachers can maintain their current workload. My passion for creating units and programming, and delivering them, has been eroded by administrative overload’ (F, 10+). For some teachers, financial obligations operated to restrict their choices for alternative employment: ‘[I stay] for financial reasons predominantly. I would love to go back to just teaching with paperwork in the background’ (F, 10+); ‘[I’ll stay] until I can find other work’ (F, 10+). The limited employment options for older teachers and uncertainty about employability in other fields emerged as a strong theme, represented by one teacher’s statement that ‘I can’t see what else I’ll do’ (F, 10+).

**Synthesis of key findings**

**NSW secondary English teachers’ workload in comparison to international, national and state averages**

Given the responses of teachers in this study, it is timely to compare their self-reported workload with the terms of contractual employment requirements. In NSW, the industrial agreement for permanent, full-time teachers stipulates a workload of 38 hours per week (NSW DoE, 2016, p. 2). This workload accords with that set out in similar employment agreements in other Australian jurisdictions and corresponds with the OECD average for lower secondary school teachers (Freeman, O’Malley & Eveleigh, 2014). Full-time secondary school teachers in NSW are required to undertake the equivalent of 20 hours and 40 minutes per week of face-to-face teaching (NSW DoE, 2016, p. 2), which closely aligns with the findings in the present study. When it comes to other activities in teachers’ workload, NSW secondary English teachers reported spending an average of six and a half hours on work activities on a weekend – a finding that chimes with the results reported in the recent Victorian SSWS (2016) and the NSW UWSFTL study (2018). The distribution of workload for teachers in the present study revealed substantially heavier demands on teachers’ time in the combined areas of administration, planning, preparation and marking, than that reported in the TALIS 2013 Australian results.

The TALIS 2013 Australian findings noted that the average workload of Australian teachers in that study was 43 hours per week, *5 more than the average for TALIS countries* [emphasis added] (Freeman et al., 2014, p. 3). From the SiAS 2013 survey results, the average workload for Australian teachers was 47.6 hours and for NSW secondary teachers 49.4 hours (McKenzie et al., 2014, p. 50). The Victorian SSWS (2016) found the average workload for secondary teachers in that state was 52.9 hours, almost 15 hours per week more than the OECD average in 2013. Similarly, the NSW UWSFTL (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018) showed that teachers in NSW public schools worked, on average, 55 hours each week. With a reported average workload of 58 hours per week, NSW secondary English teachers in the present study have a *50 per cent greater workload* than the TALIS 2013 OECD average of 38 hours, a more than *20 per cent greater workload* than the SiAS 2013 survey average, an almost *10 per cent greater workload* than Victorian secondary teachers (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), and a *3 per cent greater workload* than the average for all NSW public school teachers in the NSW UWSFTL study (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

Considering the time lag of four years between the TALIS 2013, the SiAS 2013 survey and the present study, along with the differences in the methodology and the sample size of these studies, it is problematic to make anything more than simple comparisons between the findings. However, the themes evident in NSW English teachers’ perspectives on their workload resonate strongly with the findings reported in both the Victorian SSWS (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) and the NSW UWSFTL (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

**The professional and situated dimensions: Navigating a culture of performativity**

Like teachers in the English Teacher Workload Survey (Highton et al., 2017), the Victorian *School Staff Workload Survey* (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016), and the NSW *Understanding Work in Schools* study (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018), teachers’ responses in the present study...
consistently drew attention to the ballooning nature of their non-face-to-face teaching workload and its consequences. They attributed workload pressures to substantial increases in administrative tasks (professional and situated dimensions) associated with burgeoning compliance demands around the monitoring, measurement and reporting of teacher and student performance. On this point, Day has argued that ‘there can be little doubt that teachers in this century face unprecedented national pressures to comply with policy agendas through increasingly interventionist systems of surveillance of the quality of their work and its measurable impact on pupil progress and attainment’ (Day, 2017, pp. 2–3).

For NSW secondary English teachers, the ‘national pressures to comply with policy agendas’ have been exacerbated by a number of local, situated factors. Predominant amongst these has been the intense period of curriculum reform and implementation in NSW over the past four years. Since 2014, secondary English teachers (and other subject teachers) have been required to implement a renewed junior secondary syllabus and senior secondary syllabus. Despite robust representations by the profession and other stakeholders to the statutory body responsible for curriculum in NSW – the NSW Education and Standards Authority (NESA) – arguing for the need to provide teachers with a realistic lead-in time for the implementation of a new senior secondary syllabus, teachers’ voices and professional judgement were overridden (Manuel et al., 2017).

Since English is the only compulsory subject in the NSW curriculum, the pressure on English teachers to demonstrate and account for improved achievement for all students in high-stakes national literacy tests and equally high-stakes state-based external examinations is particularly acute. These professional and situated (Day et al., 2006) dimensions of English teachers’ working lives were powerful themes in participants’ written comments, with one teacher capturing the sentiments of others by concluding that ‘it is impossible to teach well in our current policy-driven environment’ (F, 10+).

Teachers recognised that the ever-increasing demands on their time meant that they were forced to compromise the time spent on tasks they regarded as essential for improving teaching and learning, that is: planning and preparation for lessons; providing feedback to students; and engaging in reflexive practice, creative and innovative teaching, professional learning, dialogue and collaboration. For many, these compromises translated into a constellation of professional and personal (Day et al., 2006) consequences, with more than one quarter feeling ‘unsatisfied’ or ‘very unsatisfied’. Navigating a culture of performance posed direct challenges to their values, beliefs, motivation, and levels of commitment, prompting more than one quarter of classroom teachers to report that they have considered, or are considering, leaving the profession.

The teachers’ comments in this study underline what is now well understood from a growing body of research (Kyriacou, 2001; Ryan et al., 2017; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017) – that is, that workload pressures and the ensuing stress experienced by teachers as a result of external accountability and performance demands are linked to ‘adverse professional outcomes, including burnout, absenteeism, stress, and attrition’ (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 2). Studies of teacher workload and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) have shown that ‘measures of teacher burnout predict both subjective and objective health as well as teachers’ motivation and job satisfaction’ (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, p. 519).

Many teachers in this study alluded to a narrowing and impaired sense of agency wrought by pressures to comply with regulatory policies, fast-paced curriculum change (without what they believed to be necessary support and professional learning), and performance surveillance. Added to this, teachers highlighted the impact of political and public discourses of declining standards and deficit narratives of the teaching profession. These findings resonate with national and international research (Ball, 2012; Connell, 2009; Glazer, 2018; McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009, 2011, 2017; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) that similarly reports the deleterious impact of large-scale educational reforms on teachers’ levels of professional agency, autonomy, work satisfaction, motivation, enthusiasm and disposition to ‘teach to their best and well’ (Day, 2017, p. 21).

Towards re-balancing the professional, situated and personal dimensions: Teachers’ solutions

In their written comments, teachers in the study offered a range of solutions, mostly reflecting the situated dimension (Day et al., 2006; Day, 2017), to address the impact of an intensified workload on their capacity to direct their time, energy and expertise to the core business of teaching and student learning. In order of frequency, these solutions were:
required workload hours. This category of workload is therefore ‘uncontained’, often ‘invisible’ and ostensibly prone to the kind of unchecked escalation reported by teachers in this study. According to participants, this unchecked ‘invisible’ component is directly attributable to a raft of professional and situated factors. This finding aligns with the responses of teachers in the Victorian School Staff Workload Survey (Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016) and the NSW Understanding Work in Schools report (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018).

Up to one-third of English teachers in this study reported experiencing what Day et al. (2006) theorised as ‘Scenario 3’ (pp. 150–154). In this scenario, two dimensions of a teacher’s work dominate and impact on a third. For example, difficult situated conditions due to workplace demands, coupled with community expectations of quality teaching (professional dimension), impact on the teacher’s health and personal motivation leading them to be ‘more negative about their well-being and work-life balance’ (p. xiii) and their ongoing commitment to the profession. This finding emphasises that the problems of workload stress, disillusionment, burnout and struggle have a more nuanced and complex cause than the personal shortcomings of an individual teacher (Schaefer, 2013, p. 265).

Many of the English teachers in this study, like Boxer in Orwell’s Animal Farm, reported that they continue to ‘work harder’ (1945/2000, p. 25), but they are becoming increasingly aware that the systemic challenges of teaching and learning that they face cannot simply be overcome by their individual efforts alone. The flawed narrative of the individual teacher prevailing at any cost ultimately absolves institutions and systems of their responsibility for ensuring that the professional and situated conditions shaping teachers’ work are inherently enabling of quality teaching and learning – a principle laid out by the OECD (2005):

> The quality of teaching is determined not just by the ‘quality’ of the teachers – although that is clearly critical – but also the environment in which they work. Able teachers are not necessarily going to reach their potential in settings that do not provide appropriate support or sufficient challenge or reward (p. 9).

The findings of this study with NSW secondary English teachers expose the implications of an individualist-focused narrative of teachers’ work: the ‘problems’ teachers identified were overwhelmingly those stemming from interventionist policies and a lack of

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- to reduce face-to-face teaching to enable more time for planning, preparation, collaboration and genuine creativity;
- to slow down the pace of change;
- to increase support through school-based and systemic opportunities for collaborative learning and innovation;
- to remove or reduce administrative tasks associated with external regulatory and compliance requirements;
- to increase time and funding to support the implementation of new curricula; and
- to add inclusive consultation and decision-making processes around curricula and policy reform that are respectful of, and driven by, teachers’ professional judgement.

Again, these suggestions resonate strongly with those set out in the two most recent Australian studies reporting on teacher workload (McGrath-Champ et al., 2018; Weldon & Ingvarson, 2016). Representative of the common perspective of teachers in the present study was the recommendation that:

> We must have funds or reduced face to face time to cope with the changes constantly thrown at us and so we can adjust our teaching/build resources/reflect, etc. to deliver the best outcome possible. I am teaching too much ‘on the hop’ and it is neither as fulfilling or as fruitful as it could be, but I have to do so otherwise I’d work 70+ hours every week as opposed to 70+ hours during report and marking periods (F, MC).

**Concluding reflections**

For teachers in this study, the lived experience of an intensified and excessive workload was perceived to be the single most determinant factor in impeding their capacity to attend to the tasks necessary for high quality teaching and learning. Workload tasks associated with policy and curricula reform and compliance constituted the most dominant situated and professional factor undermining their levels of commitment to the profession (personal dimension). Their workload distribution can be understood in terms of two categories. The first entails the visible, ‘contained’ time allocated to face-to-face teaching, regular staff/departmental meetings, and extra-curricular activities that has remained relatively stable and in line with national and international averages.

The second category encompasses the time spent on a range of tasks beyond those necessary for effective teaching that is not formally stipulated in terms of
‘appropriate support’. Unless and until government policy, attention and funding is directed to addressing these crucial professional and situated dimensions, the work of many invested teachers will continue to be at risk as their intrinsic and altruistic ambitions as educators are jeopardised – ambitions that one teacher, representative of many more, voiced so lucidly: ‘I have a strong and clear moral purpose – that I can make a difference in the life of a child and that all children deserve a quality education’ (F, 10+).

Notes
1 The Higher School Certificate is the exit credential for final year secondary school students in NSW and includes an external examination.
2 The Board Inspector of English is responsible for the development and maintenance of the English curriculum K-12 in NSW.
3 Throughout the paper, direct quotations from participants will be referenced with identifiers of gender (F/M/O) and three categories of length of teaching experience (Early-career: 1–5 years = EC; Mid-career: 6–10 years = MC; More than 10 years’ experience = 10+)

References


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