

All Party Parliamentary Group on Schools, Learning, and Assessment

Teacher Workload, Recruitment and Retention

Meeting Minutes

Monday 13 January 2025 – 3:00pm to 4:00pm – Room O, Portcullis House

Parliamentarians in attendance

Peter Swallow MP (Chair), Chris Vince MP, Baroness Blower, Lord Hampton, Lord Aberdare.

Guest speaker

Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the National Education Union (NEU).

Agenda

Time	Details
3.00 – 3.05	Welcome to meeting and introductions (Chair Peter Swallow MP)
3.05 – 3.15	Opening remarks from Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the National Education Union
3.15 – 3.45	Discussion and Q&A (All)
3.45 – 3.55	Discussion about any follow up actions (Chair Peter Swallow MP)
3.55 – 4.00	Close of meeting

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees and invited them to introduce themselves.

The Chair explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss teacher workload, recruitment and retention.

2. Opening remarks – Daniel Kebede, General Secretary of the NEU

Drawing on evidence from NEU members, Daniel gave an overview of how excessive workload and inadequate pay among other factors are driving poor wellbeing amongst educators, and the recruitment and retention crisis in education. Key points included:

Resetting Relationships:

- Daniel welcomed the Secretary of State for Education’s commitment to reset the relationship between Ministers and education professionals.
- He was critical of the previous governments failure to make meaningful changes to the excessive workload and unsustainable working hours faced by our teachers and school leaders.

Workload:

- Citing the DfE's *Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders* survey, Daniel explained that teachers and leaders work more hours than the maximum recommended by the Working Time Regulations.

- The survey identified stress and poor wellbeing as the primary factors driving educators to consider leaving the profession. Daniel stressed that the new Labour Government must prioritise tackling these issues.
- Daniel stated that key areas around workload that need to be addressed with the profession include ensuring increased Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time, flexible working and pay.

Pay:

- Daniel stated that pay has been a significant contributor to the crisis in combination with workload.
- He highlighted that teacher pay has fallen by 25% in real terms since 2010, undermining the profession's competitiveness compared to other graduate professions. He called for multi-year pay increases above RPI inflation, accompanied by increased school funding.
- Daniel also criticised the government's proposed unfunded 2.8% pay rise for 2025, which would amount to a real terms pay cut.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill:

- Daniel explained that the NEU were pleased by many of the provisions outlined in the Bill, including non-academy schools being granted the same freedom to allow flexible working for their teachers as academies.
- He said that since the pandemic, employers across the board have introduced more flexible working patterns. In a very competitive labour market, it is extremely important that the education sector is not left behind.

Assessment and Curriculum Reform:

- Daniel advocated for a broader curriculum and changes to assessment systems, stressing the need to avoid additional workload for teachers. Therefore, he urged gradual implementation of changes with proper resourcing, avoiding the rushed reforms of the past.

Ofsted and Accountability:

- Daniel highlighted the negative impact of the current inspection regime on teacher retention and the narrowing of the curriculum. He sees proposals to move away from single word judgements as one important step to address the issues around the impact of school inspection in England on teacher and leader retention.
- He called for collaborative approaches to school improvement rather than competition driven by league tables.

3. Discussion and Q&A

Flexible working and gender specific policies

Peter Swallow MP: What beyond pay would make the biggest difference for teachers?

Daniel Kebede: Flexible working arrangements and more PPA time would make a big difference to teachers.

Baroness Blower: What about employment conditions, including maternity leave?

Daniel Kebede: it must be recognised that teaching is a gendered profession made up mostly of women. It is important that there is targeted gender-specific policy (e.g., maternity, endometriosis, menopause), and improved childcare access for female educators.

Curriculum and Assessment Reform

Chris Vince MP: How do we change the curriculum in a way that won't create additional work for teachers?

Daniel Kebede: Most teachers see the curriculum as being too overcrowded and prescriptive. To reduce workload, things need to be removed. Curriculum reform should prioritise reducing the curriculum's scope which means reviewing how schools are measured.

Improvements that don't require funding

Lord Aberdare: What can we do to improve workload, recruitment and retention without significant funding?

Daniel Kebede: There is a desire to find options that don't cost money – but there aren't many. To achieve our vision for education we need investment. We currently spend 3.9% of GDP on education compared to New Labour's spending which was over 5%.

Things may be improved through curriculum reform and injecting more creativity into schools, but to do this you need to change what schools are measured by. Improving inclusion in mainstream schools for SEND pupils is also important, but again, this needs investment.

International Comparisons

Sam Darby, Oriol Square: Has the NEU made any recent comparisons with international education systems?

Baroness Blower: No specific country excels in all areas, but there are specific things we can learn from different education systems. The most successful systems provide teacher agency, adequate pay, and respect for the profession.

Incentives for teachers

Alasdair Macdonald: Teachers have always worked long hours, but what has changed is how they are viewed. If we change what we incentivise, we could make positive changes without necessarily spending lots more money. Schools should be judged on how happy children are, their mental health, and overall well-being—not just academic performance or PISA scores.

Lessons from private schools

Lord Hampton: What lessons should we learn from private schools?

Sarah Fletcher, St Paul's Girls School: Schools should focus on what works for individual students, moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach. If children do not want to do something they will misbehave which in turn makes teachers more unhappy. When children pursue creative, community-based projects, they often do much better and are more engaged.

Flexible working and pay is not enough, teachers need agency and need to know that they are doing something worthwhile.

4. Conclusion

The Chair noted that much of the discussion focused on reforming the curriculum and changing the way educators are assessed in order to improve wellbeing and retention.

Daniel stressed that nobody is proposing a decline in standards but a meaningful system of assessment that develops students with the skills they need to be critical thinkers and lifelong learners. To navigate potential media criticism, reforms need to be framed as improvements to education standards that prepare students for a changing world.

Janeen Hayat, Fair Education Alliance, added that you need only to look at youth unemployment rates to see that the current curriculum is not serving young people.

5. Follow up actions

It was agreed that further discussion is needed to consider how curriculum and assessment reform can help improve teacher wellbeing, recruitment, and retention.

Given that the next APPG session will focus on curriculum and assessment, with Professor Becky Francis, Chair of the Curriculum and Assessment Review, attending, it was decided that members would wait until the end of the next session before proceeding with any follow-up actions.

6. AOB

The Chair thanked all for their attendance.