



# **NAHT(NI) Leadership Workload Report 2021**

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## Introduction

There is no dispute that the core role of a school leader is central to the functionality, efficacy and sustainability of our education system, not only for the sake of our children and young people, but also for our communities and the health of our wider society. School leadership represents a social endeavour that places the needs of children above all other considerations and, as such, is a civic profession that should be highly valued by society and elicit significant support and protection from government.

School leader workload, however, has become increasingly unmanageable. Fundamentally, it is this excessive workload that is detracting from the core professional work of school leaders; leading teaching, learning and safeguarding, and providing overall leadership to ensure that pupils get the best educational experience possible.

We fear that excessive workloads are impacting severely on the health and wellbeing of school leaders, thereby making the profession increasingly untenable. If the current situation continues unaltered, a recruitment crisis is inevitable. For the future of education, it is essential that the profession of school leadership continues to attract high-calibre individuals to our schools.

This report provides an in-depth analysis of school leadership workload practices, the impact of current working responsibilities on health and wellbeing and a comparative analysis of workloads in other jurisdictions.

There is an urgent need to address support both inside and outside of schools in order that the core business of schools can prosper. As part of the 2020 Agreement on Teachers' Pay and Workload (TNC 2020/01), the employers agreed to review school-leader workload. It is vital that this review delivers and that school leaders see improved terms and conditions and a reduction in workload. We hope that the contents of this report will have a significant impact on informing this work.

## Summary of findings

This review explores the evidence and research that has been undertaken on senior leadership workload in education across the globe and TALIS countries.

New research published by the World Health Organisation has shown that people working over 55 hours a week are significantly more likely to experience serious health problems in their lifetime. WHO reports that "long working hours led to 745,000 deaths from stroke and ischemic heart disease in 2016, a 29 per cent increase since 2000". WHO goes on to report that "working long hours now known to be responsible for about one-third of the total estimated work-related burden of disease, it is established as the risk factor with the largest occupational disease burden. This shifts thinking towards a relatively new and more psychosocial occupational risk factor to human health"<sup>1</sup>.

To put these findings into perspective, the BBC highlighted that "in other words, more people are dying from overwork than from malaria. This is a global health crisis,

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<sup>1</sup> WHO, WHO research on health and hours worked. 2021

demanding attention from individuals, companies and governments alike. And, if we don't solve it, the problem may not only continue – it could get worse.”<sup>2</sup>

The world health organisation presents three key recommendations that governments, employers and workers can take to protect workers' health:

- governments can introduce, implement and enforce laws, regulations and policies that ban mandatory overtime and ensure maximum limits on working time,
- bipartite or collective bargaining agreements between employers and workers' associations can arrange working time to be more flexible, while at the same time agreeing on a maximum number of working hours,
- employees could share working hours to ensure that numbers of hours worked do not climb above 55 or more per week.

Looking at the workload and hours of workers in education, and especially senior leadership, it is clear that many are working more than 55 hours a week, and in many cases, coping with severely high levels of stress.

The findings of this review highlight that senior leaders, middle leaders and teaching staff are under pressure to keep up with a high volume of workload that is having a detrimental effect on their mental health and wellbeing, the retention of teachers, and the recruitment of senior leaders.

Evidence shows that many senior leaders in the UK are often working more than 50 hours per week, with leaders often working evenings, weekends and in the holidays. 21 per cent of primary leaders and 37 per cent of secondary leaders reported that workload was 'a very serious problem' in 2019.

The EPI reports that full time teachers in England reported working, on average, 48.2 hours in the sampled week, including evenings and weekends”<sup>3</sup>. This is 19 per cent longer than full time teachers in other TALIS countries. The report even found that a fifth of teachers are working more than 60 hours a week in secondary schools.

Research conducted by NAHT of nearly 300 members working in Northern Ireland found that a Principal or Vice Principal are working an average of 57 hours per week, with 18 of these hours being worked in the evenings and on weekends.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, senior leaders were more likely to have experienced behavioural, physical and psychological symptoms, compared with teachers and staff working in other roles, in relation to high workload levels. Due to the negative impacts a high workload is having on senior leaders' wellbeing, senior leaders are more likely than those in other teaching roles to have considered leaving the profession or their role due to health or wellbeing issues.

Research has shown that the increase in senior leaders' workload globally can largely be attributed to the increasing variety of responsibilities in the role of a Principal or Vice Principal. A varied and difficult roster of responsibilities is a core challenge globally for teachers, but the UK sees a higher average of senior leadership responsibilities than elsewhere across the globe according to the OCED

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<sup>2</sup> BBC, How overwork is literally killing us, 2021

<sup>3</sup> EPI, Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools - 2016

and TALIS studies. NAHT NI research showed that, in comparison to England, senior leadership responsibilities were even greater in Northern Ireland.

The UK reports fewer teachers and department heads taking on roles in school management teams and therefore more responsibilities are falling on the heads of Principals and leaders.

Future senior leaders historically begin their career in teaching, however, the pool of interested teachers in senior leadership is dwindling. Middle leaders are experiencing a high workload, and significantly more are likely to outline their workload as a 'very serious problem'<sup>4</sup>. This, the stress and high workload experienced by current senior leaders across the globe, is leading to a lack of interest in advancing from teaching to senior leadership.

Evidence has shown that the sharing of responsibilities and expanding leadership roles within the school not only supports the Principal and Vice Principal, but increases the interest of teachers to advance to positions of leadership.

NAHT's research has shown that many of the concerns and issues for leaders in education are, in some cases, worse in Northern Ireland.

## **Background and Methodology**

This piece of background research is to explore the existing evidence around senior leadership workload. A review group established by the pay and workload settlement 2020 (TNC 2020/01)<sup>5</sup> has been formally mandated to examine the current workload of the school leaders in Northern Ireland. The group is comprised of representatives from the employers and from the recognised teaching unions. The terms of reference for the review group outline "It is proposed that an initial phase of the review should be conducted to examine current practices and the impact on the workload of Principals and Vice Principals. It is important that the day-to-day workloads of Principals and Vice Principals are properly balanced to ensure they can continue to fully support all staff and pupils in their schools."

It follows to conclude that "The review will recommend alternative approaches where these have the potential to ease Principal and Vice Principal workloads without compromising the overall level of support available to pupils."

This literature review is subject to further edits and information that arises in the leadership workload review group.

NAHT(NI) has set up an internal working group of members to explore the specific evidence and issues around leadership workload for school leaders. We also held a number of focus groups to support this work and gather evidence from school leaders outside of the initial focus group. It was the decision of this internal working group to instigate a member wide survey.

The research explored in this report tends to focus on the UK, but this is often predominately teachers and senior leaders in England. There are comparisons and

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<sup>4</sup> DfE – Workload survey - 2019

<sup>5</sup> TNC 2020/01 , 'Agreement between Management and Trade Union Side', 2020

case studies mentioned throughout from other TALIS countries that could provide insight and recommendations to improving senior leadership workload in Northern Ireland. The research reviewed is from a range of sources, and the data gathered spans from 2008 to 2020.

To bolster the work of the OECD and other research reviewed, NAHT(NI) conducted one of the largest surveys of senior leaders in Northern Ireland with 295 respondents. The survey was tailored to gather data on workload. The survey ran in September 2021 and featured questions asked in the TALIS 2018 study, and the 2019 DfE workload survey.

The total number of survey respondents was 295 senior leaders currently working all phases of compulsory education in Northern Ireland. The following table shows the breakdown of respondents and its relational percentage to the number of schools within this category in Northern Ireland.

**Figure 1. Table of respondents by region, school type, school phase and role.**

Category	Type of school	Number of responses	Percentage of type of school in Northern Ireland represented in the research
<b>School Type</b>	Controlled	161	33 per cent
	Catholic Maintained	70	16 per cent
	Voluntary	7	11 per cent
	Integrated	17	26 per cent
	Irish-Medium	5	19 per cent
	Special	24	62 per cent
	Independent	0	0 per cent
	Other (please specify)	10	n/a
<b>School Phase</b>	Nursery	29	31 per cent
	Primary	176	22 per cent
	Post Primary	53	27 per cent
	All phases	20	n/a
	Other (please specify)	16	n/a

Source: Department of Education for Northern Ireland

**Figure 2. Table of respondent totals by role in school**

Category	Type of school (multiple selection available)	Number of responses
<b>Role in school</b>	Principal	254
	Vice principal	36
	Bursar / school business manager	13
	Subject leader / head of department	16
	Head of year / head of key stage	10
	SENCo/LSC	34
	Other middle leader	1
	Other (please specify)	21

NAHT(NI) also conducted multiple focus groups of members who work across school phases and in Vice Principal and Principal roles. These groups span the end of the 2020/21 academic year and the beginning of the 2021/22 year.

## What are the core issues?

Surveys and existing evidence show that the workload of principals and vice principals in Northern Ireland has become excessive and, in some cases, unmanageable. In 2008, the OECD ranked improving school leadership as the third most important activity for the education committee programme of work.<sup>6</sup> They found four main issues:

1. Lack of clarity about the core roles of school leadership
2. Role overload
3. Insufficient preparation and training
4. Concerns about recruiting new school leaders

The Jordanstown Agreement and subsequent workload agreements are unable to account for the additional responsibilities placed on school leaders and sets no time limit on their hours.

The role of a Principal or Vice Principal includes specific, additional pressures that are not usually faced by the wider teaching profession. Principals are typically performing multiple roles. Leaders are often burdened by a largely unseen workload that includes, but is not limited to the following:

- managing relationships with parents
- budgetary responsibilities
- effects of Local Management System (LMS)
- inclusion and SEN
- working with staff at their school
- relationships with external agencies

Evidence and recruitment difficulties have shown that teaching staff, once looking to advance into senior leadership are not applying for middle management or senior leadership roles.

In *Improving School Leadership*, a report by the OECD in 2008<sup>7</sup>, it is outlined “the challenge is to improve the quality of current leadership and build sustainable leadership for the future. Evidence indicates that potential applicants are deterred by the heavy workload of principals and the fact that the job does not seem to be adequately remunerated or supported.” They continue to state that “the challenge is to improve the quality of current leadership and build sustainable leadership for the future. Evidence indicates that potential applicants are deterred by the heavy workload of principals and the fact that the job does not seem to be adequately remunerated or supported”<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> OECD, *Improving School Leadership*, 2008

<sup>7</sup> OECD, 2008

<sup>8</sup> OECD, 2008



With limited support services, many Principals and Vice Principals feel unsupported by the Department of Education and the employers of school leaders.

In the OECD report, 'A teachers guide to TALIS' (2018), it states "the UK is above the OCED average of teachers who want to leave the profession in the next five years. This is a fifth of teachers in the UK under 50" and, moreover, "teachers who agree that 'they regret becoming a teacher' or 'wonder whether it would have been better to choose another professional' is the highest shift across all the TALIS countries from 2013 to 2018"<sup>9</sup>.

In the NAHT workload survey, only a third (30 per cent) of school leaders in Northern Ireland would be likely (either very or fairly) to recommend school leadership as a career. A fifth (19 per cent) stated 'very unlikely'. Post Primary leaders are significantly more likely to recommend a career in school leadership than those in Primary (43 per cent versus 25 per cent). 41 per cent of leaders state they are likely to retire early, whilst a third (33 per cent) plan to remain in their current role. Nine percent want to leave senior leadership or the teaching profession all together.

In a members' focus group conducted by NAHT, members shared their struggles with well-being and the increasingly demanding role of being a Principal or Vice Principal;

*"Sometimes you feel embarrassed to say how difficult it is because you are meant to be second in charge, but it is hard. And when you are with the children you aren't present because of the large to do list of things you know you need to do."*

## Evidence from the research

### The workload of senior leaders

Research shows that across the globe, teachers and senior leaders are overworked. In the DfE Teacher Workload Survey from 2019<sup>10</sup>, senior leaders in England and Wales report working an average of 55.1 hours a week. Primary leaders report an average of 54.4 hours a week whilst Secondary senior leaders report 56.4 hours on average.

An NAHT(NI) survey of nearly 300 senior leaders found that leaders were working an average of 56.6 hours a week in Northern Ireland. For Primary leaders in Northern Ireland the average was 57.5, whilst in Post Primary this was 54.7. The research found that the average hours worked was higher than the average in England from the 2019 workload survey from the DfE.

Furthermore, NAHT found that senior leaders in Northern Ireland were working an average of 18 hours a week in the evenings and at the weekend. Many leaders in Northern Ireland reported working an additional 19 hours a week on average due to the covid-19 pandemic. This was highest among Primary leaders, 18.7 hours, Post Primary leaders, this was 18.5 hours, 16.9 hours for Nursery and 18.3 hours for Special.

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<sup>9</sup> OECD, The Teachers guide to TALIS, 2018

<sup>10</sup> DfE, 2019



In England and Wales in 2019, the total average hours worked by senior leaders has decreased since 2016, but still remains high. This accounts for the fall in leaders who state that workload was a 'very serious problem' with "21 per cent of primary respondents and 37 per cent of secondary respondents reported that workload was 'a very serious problem', compared with 49 per cent and 56 per cent in 2016 respectively."<sup>11</sup>

In Northern Ireland, 38 per cent of senior leaders in 2021 felt that teacher workload was a very serious problem. This was exceptionally high in Primary leaders (45 per cent) and a quarter (26 per cent) of Post Primary leaders felt workload was a very serious problem.

Interestingly, middle leaders interviewed for the research were feeling the largest amount of strain, with 34 per cent of middle leaders stating workload was a very serious problem (compared with 20 per cent of senior leaders overall).

In the NAHT NI survey on workload, it showed that over a third (38 per cent) of Principals felt workload of teachers is a very serious problem, and a following three in ten (29 per cent) of Vice Principals. Very few leaders, either Principals or Vice Principals in Northern Ireland felt workload was not a problem, with 88 per cent of Principals listing it as a problem, and 87 per cent of Vice Principals. No leaders in Northern Ireland felt workload was not a problem at all.

In conclusion, "most respondents reported that they could not complete their workload within their contracted hours, that they did not have an acceptable workload, and that they did not achieve a good work-life balance".<sup>12</sup> In the NAHT NI survey in Northern Ireland, 95 per cent of leaders feel they do not have an acceptable workload. Furthermore, nearly all (99 per cent) felt they cannot complete their assigned workload during their contracted hours.

The Education Policy Institute<sup>13</sup> undertook their own analysis from the TALIS findings in 2016 and found that in the UK "Full time teachers in England reported working, on average, 48.2 hours in the sampled week, including evenings and weekends"<sup>14</sup>. This is 19 per cent longer than full time teachers in other TALIS countries. The report even found that a fifth of teachers are working more than 60 hours a week in secondary schools. The report concludes that "workload represents a significant barrier to accessing professional development according to 60 per cent of teachers in the UK"<sup>15</sup>.

In Australia, it was found that school leaders were working "an average of approximately 55.2 hours a week during the school term, with approximately 97.3 per cent reported working over 40 hours a week, and approximately 72.4 per cent reported working over 50 hours a week"<sup>16</sup>. School leaders were reporting the sheer quantity of work they had, and the lack of time that they needed to focus on teaching and learning, and student mental health.

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<sup>11</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>12</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>13</sup> EPI, Teacher workload and professional development in England's secondary schools - 2016

<sup>14</sup> EPI, 2016

<sup>15</sup> EPI, 2016

<sup>16</sup> ACU, The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey, 2019

Furthermore, Australian school leaders overwhelmingly (84 per cent) “reported being subjected to offensive behaviour over the last year, with 51 per cent reported having received threats of violence, and over 42 per cent being exposed to physical violence.”<sup>17</sup>. Unsurprisingly, school leaders interviewed were reporting “very large effect sizes for Burnout, Sleeping Troubles and Stress compared to the general population.”<sup>18</sup>

A support organisation in the UK, Education Support<sup>19</sup>, conducted a review of teaching wellbeing and found that a role in senior leadership was having a huge strain on Principal and Vice Principals wellbeing and mental health. They found “84 per cent of senior leaders responded they were stressed, compared to 73 per cent of teachers and 61 per cent of people working in other roles”<sup>20</sup>. Senior leaders were more likely to cope with workplace stress or anxiety by turning to food, eating to cope with stress and anxiety than staff working in other roles at the school.

The report states “Senior leaders work much longer hours than they are contracted to do – only 3 per cent are contracted to work 51+ hours per week and yet 68 per cent do so”<sup>21</sup>, and because of these long hours and the workload senior leaders currently have “senior leaders were more likely to have experienced behavioural, physical and psychological symptoms, compared with teachers and staff working in other roles”<sup>22</sup>.

Due to the negative impacts a high workload is having on senior leaders’ wellbeing, it is perhaps unsurprising that senior leaders are more likely than those in other teaching roles to have considered leaving the profession or their role due to health or wellbeing issues.

NAHT found in their research that half (50 per cent) of leaders in Northern Ireland reported a very high level of stress in their current role, a further 37 per cent reported a high level of stress, and 11 per cent reported a moderated level of stress. Only 2 per cent of leaders reported a low level or no level of stress in their current role. 81 per cent of leaders in Special reported a very high, or high level of stress whilst 91 per cent of Primary leaders reported the same.

Principals, in particular, in Northern Ireland reported a very high level of stress (52 per cent) compared with 29 per cent of Vice Principals. However, no Vice Principals at all reported a low level or no level of stress.

Aside from covid-19 and keeping on top of new guidance, leaders in Northern Ireland were most likely to list long working hours (86 per cent), general level of workload (86 per cent) and high level of administration/paperwork (86 per cent) as their top causes of stress in their current role. Difficulties working with the Education Authority were listed as top causes, such as lack of timely communications and guidance from EA (81 per cent) and lack of clear guidance (78 per cent). Budget constraints (69 per cent) and lack of SEN support (67 per cent) also featured highly.

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<sup>17</sup> ACU, 2019

<sup>18</sup> ACU, 2019

<sup>19</sup> Education support, The impact of workload school leaders, 2020

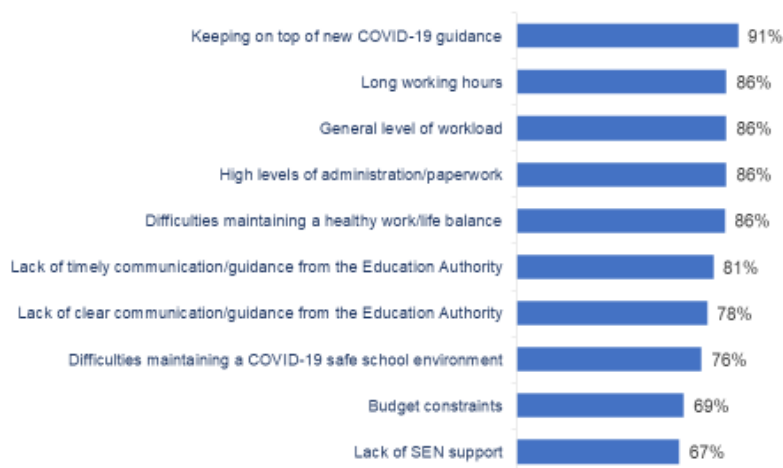
<sup>20</sup> Education support, 2020

<sup>21</sup> Education support, 2020

<sup>22</sup> Education support, 2020

**Figure 1. Causes of stress for leaders in Northern Ireland**

**Which, if any, of the following are currently particular causes of stress for you? (Top 10)**



Ask of all who reported a level of stress. Base: 167

## Increasing areas of responsibility

Research has shown that the increase in senior leaders' workload globally can largely be attributed to the increasing variety of responsibilities in the role of a Principal or Vice Principal. The OECD outlined in 2008 that "among other things, principals are expected to take on enhanced administrative and managerial tasks, handle financial and human resources, manage public relations and build coalitions, engage in quality management and public reporting processes and provide leadership for learning. This workload goes beyond what one single individual can possibly achieve successfully".<sup>23</sup>

More recently, the OECD evidences that this claim has not changed. In a Teacher's guide to TALIS<sup>24</sup>, they outline that "fewer than the OECD average of teachers and department heads are represented on the school management teams, with more responsibilities falling to Principals and leaders".

The OECD conducted a study titled 'Education at a Glance' in 2016, in which they outline key issues causing high workload and dissatisfaction in the teaching profession, and particularly for senior leaders. It outlines "in contexts where most decision-making authority has been devolved to the school level, principals can be especially challenged by the number and variety of demands they face: increasing social diversity, inclusion of students with special needs, emphasis on retaining students until graduation, and ensuring that students have the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in an increasingly competitive economy".<sup>25</sup>

A varied and difficult roster of responsibilities amongst senior leaders is a large challenge globally for teachers, but the UK sees a higher average of senior leadership responsibilities than elsewhere across the globe.

<sup>23</sup> OECD, 2008

<sup>24</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>25</sup> OECD, Educational at a Glance, 2016

The report looks at principals who have significant responsibility for tasks such as appointing, hiring, suspending and dismissing teachers; determining the allocation of the school's resources; approving student admission; establishing the school's disciplinary and assessment policies; and determining which courses the school offers, course content, and instructional resources.

It found that the UK is above the OECD average on Principals with significant responsibility for each of the following:

- Appointing or hiring teachers: **66 per cent** (41 per cent)
- Suspending teachers from employment: **55 per cent** (31 per cent)
- Establishing teachers starting salaries and setting pay scales **51 per cent** (16 per cent)
- Determining teachers' salary increase **61 per cent** (20 per cent)
- Deciding on budget allocations within the school **74 per cent** (49 per cent)
- Establishing student disciplinary policies and procedures **73 per cent** (63 per cent)
- Approving students for admission to the school **49 per cent** (37 per cent)
- Choose which learning materials are used **34 per cent** (48 per cent)
- Deciding which courses are offered **66 per cent** (59 per cent)

**UK figure** (OECD average figure)

In the UK, Principals are more likely to be significantly responsible for all of the above than the OECD average, except for 'choosing which learning materials are used' and they are closer to average than most on 'deciding which courses are offered'.

NAHT research of leaders in Northern Ireland showed that Principals had a higher level of responsibility for each than in the rest of the UK. 95 per cent of Principals in Northern Ireland have a significant responsibility in establishing student disciplinary policies, for approving students for admission to the school and appointing or recruiting teachers. In fact, the only task in which Principals were less likely to have a significant role than in the UK was for establishing teachers' starting salaries, including setting pay scales (53 per cent).

Leaders in Primary in Northern Ireland were significantly more likely to report having responsibility for what materials are used (88 per cent) in comparison with Post Primary (33 per cent). In Post Primary, these was more likely to be the responsibility of other members of the school leadership team (67 per cent) or teachers not in leadership (70 per cent), however 11 per cent reported this was the responsibility of the school governing board and more than a quarter (26), stated the local municipality, regional, state or national authority.

Principals in Special schools in Northern Ireland are the least likely to report having responsibility for teachers starting salaries, or salary increases (50 per cent). This is significantly lower than those leading in Post Primary (74 per cent) and in Primary (67 per cent).

Principals in Nursery schools in Northern Ireland are particularly stretched thin. In all categories, over 80 per cent reported that Principals have a significant responsibility for all tasks, apart from establishing teachers' starting salaries (42 per cent). 100 per cent of leaders reported that the Principal has a significant level of responsibility for establishing student disciplinary policies, establishing student assessment policies,

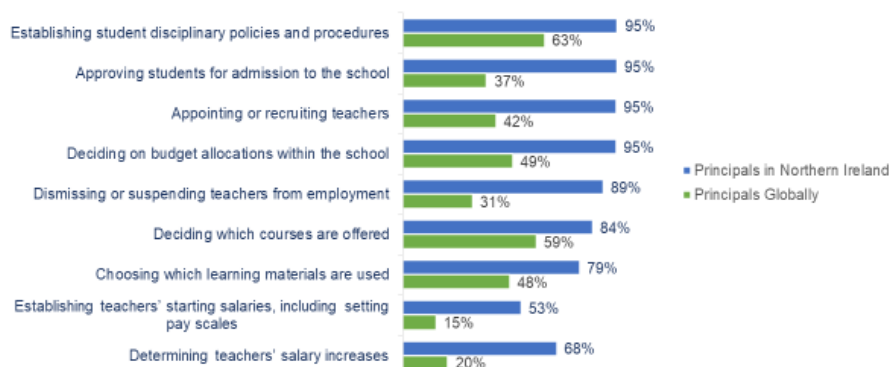
approving students for admission to the school and choosing which learning materials are used.

In Nursery, whilst 95 per cent of Principals reported being responsible for deciding on budget allocations within the school, 40 per cent reported that the school governing body had a major responsibility as well.

Research conducted by the EPI in 2021, highlighted that Northern Ireland has the least spending per pupil across the UK (£5,800 per pupil compared with £6,100 in England and Wales). This is linked to the fact that “schools are responsible for a larger share of funding in England (90 per cent) than in Wales (84 per cent) and a much larger share than in Scotland (66 per cent) and Northern Ireland (60 per cent), where the Department of Education and the Education Authority play a very large role”<sup>26</sup>. It follows that “headteachers in England and Wales have more control over formulating school budgets than in Northern Ireland and Scotland. Local government has more influence on formulating school budgets in Scotland, while the NI Assembly has more influence in Northern Ireland.”<sup>27</sup> The NAHT research and the research conducted by the EPI highlight that whilst leaders in Northern Ireland have less financial autonomy for their schools, they hold greater levels of responsibility than their peers across the UK.

**Figure 2. Level of responsibility of Principals in Northern Ireland compared with the OECD global average**

Regarding this school, who has a significant responsibility for the following tasks? A ‘significant responsibility’ is one where an active role is played in decision making. Please mark as many choices as appropriate in each row



Asked to all leaders in Northern Ireland. Base: 168

The OECD highlights that “because of its complexity, the work of the school and especially the work of the Principal are increasingly recognised as responsibilities that are, or should be, more broadly shared. Distributed leadership reflects the fact that leadership in schools is not exerted only by Principals, that others within the organisation also act as leaders”<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> EPI, 2021, UK Institution Comparisons

<sup>27</sup> EPI, 2021

<sup>28</sup> OECD, 2016

The OECD report concludes by outlining that “governments need to trust school leaders to be the people on the ground who are best placed to make decisions for their schools” and that furthermore “the variety of tasks for which school leaders are responsible pulls them in many different directions on a regular basis. However, it is important to remember that providing students with the best possible learning experience is the central objective of any school. Principals need to reflect on their workload and judge whether they dedicate enough time to providing instructional leadership in their schools. They may need to expand the school leadership team or build teacher leadership capacity in order to delegate tasks and commit more of their own time to academic leadership”<sup>29</sup>.

In the NAHT survey of leaders in Northern Ireland, respondents were asked what percentage of their time was taken up by the following task areas:

1. Administrative tasks and meetings: Including regulations, reports, school budget, preparing timetables and class composition, responding to requests from EA or DENI officials
2. Leadership tasks and meetings: Including strategic planning, leadership and management activities such as developing school improvement plans, and human resource and personnel issues such as recruiting staff
3. Curriculum and teaching-related tasks and meetings: Including developing curriculum, teaching, classroom observations, student evaluation, mentoring teachers, teacher professional development
4. Student interactions: Including counselling and conversations outside structured learning activities, discipline
5. Parent or guardian interactions: Including formal and informal interactions
6. Interactions with local and regional community, business and industry

The research found that leaders on average reported spending 31 per cent of their time on administrative tasks and meetings, 21 per cent of their time on leadership tasks and meeting and 19 per cent on curriculum and teaching related tasks. Primary Leaders were the most likely to be spending the most time on administrative work (33 per cent) compared with 22 per cent on average for Post Primary and Nursery leaders.

39 per cent on average of leaders in Nurseries’ time was taken up with curriculum and teaching related tasks, whilst only 5 per cent of their time was taken up with student interactions (that included counselling, conversations outside structured learning activities and discipline).

Vice Principals in Northern Ireland reported that 22 per cent of their time was taken up with administrative work, and 20 per cent leadership related tasks.

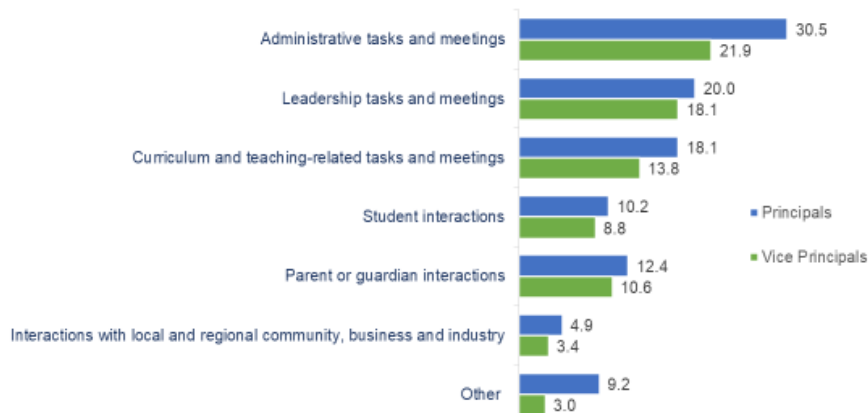
### **Figure 3. Percentage of time taken up with different types of tasks for Principals and Vice Principals in Northern Ireland**

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<sup>29</sup> OECD, 2018



On average throughout the school year, what percentage of time in your role as a principal do you spend on the following tasks in this school?



Asked to all leaders in Northern Ireland. Base: 168

In a further breakdown, leaders in Northern Ireland were asked how many hours they were taking performing certain tasks. These were:

- Leadership and management within the school: Including strategic planning, preparing for and participating in governing board meetings, staff meetings and other school-centred management activities, such as those associated with the management of federated schools.
- Administration within the school: Including applying regulations to the school, reporting, school budget, preparing timetables and class composition.
- Administrative and management with external bodies: Including responding to requests from local, regional, or national education officials
- Performance management of staff: Including human resource/personnel issues, classroom observations, mentoring, initial teacher training and continuing professional development
- Teaching and related tasks: Including covering for teacher absences, lesson planning, assessing and marking pupils' work and student assessment
- Curriculum planning, including developing curriculum and student evaluation
- Data analysis: Including analysis performance data at the level of the teacher and the school and record keeping for external bodies/ regulatory purposes
- Student interactions: Including counselling and conversations outside structured learning activities, discipline
- Parent or guardian interactions: Including formal and informal interactions
- Recruitment For teaching and support staff
- Other activities

Leaders in Northern Ireland were most likely to be spending time on teaching and related tasks (an average of 8.7 hours a week), leadership and management within the school (8.6 hours on average) and administration within the school (7.7 hours). Leaders, in particular Principals, were spending an average of 7.1 hours a week on administrative and management with external bodies.

Nursery leaders in Northern Ireland were spending a significant amount of time on teaching and related tasks (25.2 hours per week) compared with only 4.4 hours



spent on average by leaders in Post Primary, 8.1 hours in Primary and 1.5 hours in Special.

Vice Principals in Northern Ireland were spending an average of 11.4 hours per week on teaching and related tasks, compared with 8.3 hours spent on average by Principals. Both Principals and Vice Principals alike were spending an average of 3.5 hours a week on the performance management of staff (whether this is human resources, classroom observations, mentoring, etc.). In Special, leaders reported spending 6.7 hours on average per week on Performance management of staff.

When leaders in Northern Ireland were asked what they thought of the time spent on different tasks, a large majority thought they were spending too much or far too much time on administration within the school (62 per cent) and on administrative and management of external bodies (68 per cent).

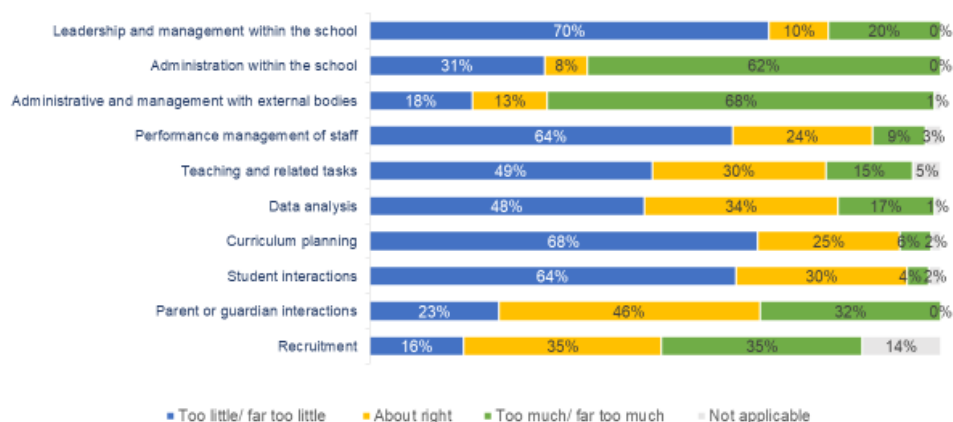
Leaders felt they were spending far too little or too little time on leadership and management within the school (70 per cent) and performance management of staff (64 per cent). A further 68 per cent felt they spent too little time on curriculum planning and student interactions (64 per cent).

Leaders in Special schools felt overwhelmingly they were spending too little time on performance management of staff (88 per cent), student interactions (81 per cent) and leadership and management within the school (81 per cent). 69 per cent felt they were spending too much time on administrative and management with external bodies.

Within a focus group, a leader in Special stated *“working with staff takes up most of my time. Because I work in Special, there are not many pupils, but lots of staff. I feel like a HR manager really, this is a Special school specific issue. Covid has really added to this. I want to be working more with pupils”*.

**Figure 4. Leaders in Northern Ireland's perception of their time spent on different tasks**

Across the whole school year, is the amount of time you were able to spend on the activities outlined in the last question too little, too much or about right?



Asked to all. Base: 186

## Lack of interest in senior leadership

The OECD, in their guide to TALIS, argue that “Providing strong teachers with leadership opportunities – without taking them out of the classroom – can serve as useful professional development and can keep teachers interested in their work over the course of their careers” they follow by stating “in addition, when teachers are involved in school decisions, they are more likely to buy in to any changes in policy or practice and can act as champions for new initiatives with their colleagues”.<sup>30</sup> However, in practice, building momentum and interest in senior leadership is proving to be a large barrier to recruiting new senior leaders and sharing responsibilities.

In Education at a Glance<sup>31</sup>, the OECD summarises the typical profile of a senior leader, “the average age of a lower secondary school leader in the countries participating in TALIS 2013 is 52 years old. Given that principals are often recruited from the ranks of teachers, it is not surprising that the proportion of principals younger than 40 years old is small, with some notable exceptions”<sup>32</sup>.

It has long been the case that future senior leaders begin their career in teaching, however, the pool of interested teachers in senior leadership is dwindling. As outlined earlier, middle leaders are experiencing a high workload and significantly more were likely to outline their workload as a ‘very serious problem’<sup>33</sup>. This and the experienced stress and high workload of current senior leaders across the globe, is leading to a lack of interest in advancing from teaching to senior leadership.

In the Teachers Guide to TALIS<sup>34</sup>, the OECD highlight evidence that where school leaders have shared responsibilities with other staff, it has increased positive outcomes for senior leaders, and gained interest in senior leadership from the teaching staff.

The OECD outlines that successful school leadership is based on building a culture of collaboration within schools by exchange and coordination (teachers working together, exchanging materials, having discussions about students, etc.) and professional collaboration (team teaching, collaborative professional development and learning, observing other teachers teach, providing feedback).

The report states, “when teachers feel fulfilled with their work, they are more satisfied with both their work and their profession. Teachers’ job satisfaction is therefore vital for school leaders who don’t want to lose staff, as research shows that job satisfaction is related to teacher attrition, burnout and their commitment to their work. It has also been shown to be related to teachers’ performance as well as their attitudes toward teaching and confidence in their own abilities”<sup>35</sup>.

This is not always an easy feat, teachers, alongside senior leaders, report high workloads and high levels of stress. For teachers, the top causes of stress are as follows:

- Having too much administrative work to do
- Being held responsible for students’ achievement

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<sup>30</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>31</sup> OECD, 2016

<sup>32</sup> OECD, 2016

<sup>33</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>34</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>35</sup> OECD, 2018

- Keeping up with changing requirements from local, regional or national authorities

To combat these core issues, in the Slovak Republic, national reforms have been enacted that consider the significant burden that administrative tasks can have on busy teachers. A working group was convened by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport in 2015 to put a plan in place to reduce the extra workload caused by the administrative tasks that teachers face. Together, government officials and education representatives were able to streamline, automate or eliminate many procedures that caused unnecessary work for teacher. The government has committed to review and address teacher workload issues on an ongoing basis.<sup>36</sup>

In England, the Department for Education has created a toolkit for schools with resources and practical suggestions designed to help reduce some of the workload that can lead to unnecessary stress in schools. This toolkit contains suggestions for supporting early career teachers, case studies of practices that have been proven to work in schools, advice from school leaders, reports from independent groups as well as research on reducing teacher workload.

The creation of this toolkit has correlated in teachers and senior leaders in 2019 reporting fewer hours worked than in 2016 “senior leaders reported working an average total of 55.1 hours in the reference week in 2019. This is down 5.4 hours from the 60.52 hours reported in 2016”<sup>37</sup>.

Fewer senior leaders were likely to report that “that workload was a ‘very serious problem’ in 2019 than in 2016: in 2019, 21 per cent of primary respondents and 37 per cent of secondary respondents reported that workload was ‘a very serious problem’, compared with 49 per cent and 56 per cent in 2016 respectively”<sup>38</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, the NAHT survey found that 38 per cent of senior leaders in all phases in 2021 felt that teacher workload was a very serious problem.

Perhaps, in light of this, more than half (56 per cent) of leaders in Northern Ireland feel that staff at their school are either unmotivated (30 per cent) or very unmotivated (27 per cent) to take on additional leadership duties. Only 39 per cent feel staff are motivated to take on additional leadership duties.

Just over half (56 per cent) of leaders in Special schools feel that their staff are motivated to take on additional leadership duties with 44 per cent not motivated. In Nursery schools, leaders report overwhelmingly that staff are unmotivated to take on additional leadership duties (75 per cent), with no leaders reporting any staff being ‘very motivated’.

Primary school leaders also report a high level of staff unmotivated to take on leadership duties (64 per cent), with only a third (33 per cent) very motivated or motivated. The picture is better in Post Primary in Northern Ireland, with 58 per cent of leaders reporting levels of motivation, and 38 per cent reporting unmotivated.

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<sup>36</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>37</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>38</sup> DfE, 2019

In an NAHT members focus group, many leaders expressed similar concerns, and that the roles they were performing have amplified over recent years and this is seen by other members of staff at their schools:

*“A lot of the roles would have gone to specialist leads in the past, now Vice Principals and Principals are carrying these out. Tasks that traditionally would have been done by others are now being done by leaders, as other teaching staff are no longer willing to do it for just a little extra money.”*

As previously outlined, the UK reports fewer teachers and department heads taking on representation in school management teams and therefore more responsibilities are falling to Principals and leaders. The OECD states “providing strong teachers with leadership opportunities – without taking them out of the classroom – can serve as useful professional development and can keep teachers interested in their work over the course of their careers”<sup>39</sup>.

In New Zealand, schools have created a number of additional leadership roles that are available in primary and secondary. These range from curriculum leaders and department heads to leaders of pastoral care. The central government provides funding to schools for the purpose of appointing a Specialist Classroom Teacher (SCT). These SCTs are given time and remuneration to take on the responsibility of providing teaching and learning support to other classroom teachers at their schools.

Further TALIS data in this report reveals that “in schools where school leaders have this authority to regulate teachers’ salaries, 55 per cent of teachers report receiving a financial award as a result of their appraisal. In schools where the leadership does not have this power, only 30 per cent of teachers report that their appraisal led to a raise or bonus. Thus, the autonomy of school leaders can influence teachers not only in ways that support the development of their teaching, but also in ways that might impact teachers’ careers.”<sup>40</sup>

The OECD guide to TALIS concludes that “if schools are to foster a culture of autonomy, both government and school leaders need to trust teachers to manage their own work and to make the best decisions, based on educators’ own professional expertise and the requirements of the issues they face”.<sup>41</sup>

## **Recommendations from the evidence**

Pont, Nusche and Moorman state in their study on Improving School Leadership for the OECD that “school autonomy alone does not automatically lead to improved leadership. On one hand, in increasingly autonomous schools, it is important that the core responsibilities of school leaders are clearly defined and delimited. School leaders should have an explicit mandate to focus on those domains that are most conducive to improved school and student outcomes. Otherwise, school autonomy may lead to role overload, by making the job more time-consuming, increasing administrative and managerial workloads and deflecting time and attention away from instructional leadership”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>40</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>41</sup> OECD, 2018

<sup>42</sup> OECD, 2008

In 'Education at a Glance', the OECD advocate for senior leaders to spend more time in the classroom, they state "while principals who must also carry the workload of a classroom teacher will undoubtedly have many extra tasks to accomplish, retaining some teaching responsibilities also keeps them closer to the core job of the school. They are able to maintain a different kind of relationship with students – and possibly with teaching staff – and can even test some of the policies they are trying to enact at a school level"<sup>43</sup>.

The report outlines that more collaboration between principals and teachers to solve classroom problems varies across countries. In the UK, 60 per cent or more Principals report infrequent collaboration with teachers to solve classroom discipline problems, and this is higher than the OECD country average.

The OECD concludes that "TALIS data show that principals who exert greater instructional leadership work in schools in which teachers are more engaged in collaboration. This suggests that when principals take action to support co-operation among teachers to develop new teaching practices, teachers are indeed more inclined to collaborate. In these schools, teachers more often exchange teaching materials with colleagues, engage in discussions about the development of specific students, work together to ensure common standards in evaluations for assessing student progress, and attend team conferences. This may indicate that the actions principals take to develop co -operation and to promote teachers' responsibility for their instruction affect teachers' collaboration in school"<sup>44</sup>.

In the ACU study on the 'Principal occupational health and wellbeing survey data' of school leaders, they arrive at fifteen recommendations to improve school leadership with responsibilities that span across society.

They outline responsibilities and actions to be taken by government, employers, communities, unions, schools, teachers and researchers. These fifteen recommendations highlight what government can do, employers, communities, schools and teachers themselves.

The recommendations range from governments changing the focus from 'short term quick fixes' and concentrating on fundamentals to employers taking a 'trust rather than rule' approach to educators.

The report by the OECD in 2008 highlights the importance of professional development and collaboration between schools and senior leaders. They recommend "the collective sharing of skills, expertise and experience will create much richer and more sustainable opportunities for rigorous transformation than can ever be provided by isolated institutions, say the authors. But attaining this future demands that we give school leaders more possibilities in taking the lead"<sup>45</sup>.

The University of Cambridge in 2001, further supports this idea in their Leadership for Learning framework. Key focuses of the LLF are: Maintaining a focus on learning as an activity; creating conditions favourable to learning as an activity; creating a dialogue about Leadership for Learning; The sharing of leadership and a shared sense of accountability.

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<sup>43</sup> OECD, 2016

<sup>44</sup> OECD, 2016

<sup>45</sup> OECD, 2008

In the NAHT research, leaders were asked what would help ease their workload, and leaders reported that ‘a cap on the hours of work expected of Principals and Vice Principals’ (84 per cent) would be the most welcome. Secondly, ‘a reform of the open-ended contractual clauses in the Jordanstown Agreement’ (80 per cent) and ‘A time budget for School Leaders’ (78 per cent).

More than seven in ten (71 per cent) stated that creating more senior leadership roles with enhanced salary scales to spread out responsibilities would help ease workload. 73 per cent of leaders working in Post Primary felt this would help, and 73 per cent of those in Primary. Nearly all (94 per cent) of leaders in Special felt creating more senior leadership roles would help.

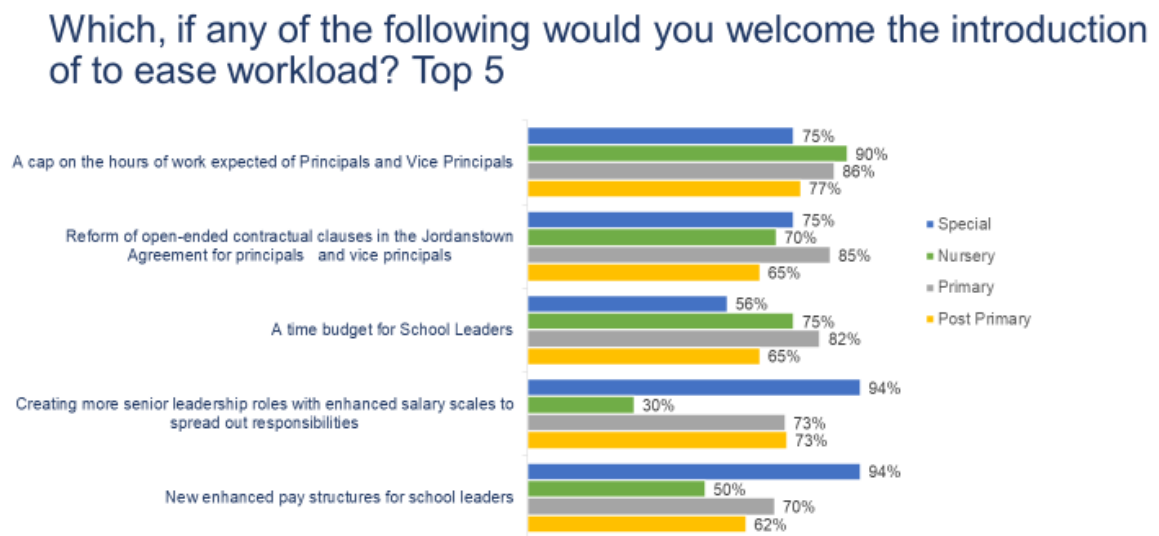
Within an NAHT focus group, one Vice Principal expressed that being a leader can be lonely but professional support and a community of other leaders can really help.

*“It struck me when I started that leadership is quite a lonely job. I ended up doing a course and actually it was really good to have a support system where you could all talk about the new job and the experiences you were going through. When you are replacing someone its hard, staff and the community around the school expect you to be able to fill the shoes straight away and actually you can’t and people shouldn’t expect that from you immediately”.*

There was a lot of support for the creation of more administrative support roles amongst leaders (66 per cent), and this was especially the case for leaders in Post Primary (77 per cent), Special (69 per cent), and Primary (66 per cent). Nursery leaders were in favour of this (35 per cent).

A welcome measure to ease workload was more targeted and effective funding for schools (67 per cent) which was particularly favourable to leaders in Primary (71 per cent) and Special (69 per cent).

**Figure 5. Measures that would help ease workload by school phase and type in Northern Ireland**



Asked to all leaders in Northern Ireland. Base: 167



## Conclusion

We urge the employers to fully consider all of the information contained within this report. As the school leader review arising from the Agreement on Teachers' Pay and Workload (TNC 2020/01) is ongoing, NAHT(NI) will continue to be fully committed to working with all stakeholders to produce real and tangible change.

Following the research conducted by NAHT, NAHT (NI) published its 2021/22 manifesto on the 22 October 2021 which includes a non-exhaustive list of recommendations. It states "School leader workload is increasingly unmanageable resulting in leaders being diverted from the core business of schools to respond to administrative and managerial tasks. If the profession is to continue to attract high calibre education professionals to lead our schools, then this must be addressed as a matter of urgency".<sup>46</sup>

Whilst the production of in-depth recommendations continues as a collaborative work in progress with the review group, all trade unions and employers, at the very minimum, **NAHT contends it is vital that:**

- All school leaders should have access to protected leadership and management time
- All schools should have adequate administrative teams
- School leadership pay scales should be reviewed to ensure all school leaders have adequate remuneration
- School leaders should have a cap on their maximum number of hours of work
- Schools should have enhanced leadership teams. The role of Assistant principal should be officially recognised in NI to ensure there is adequate capacity to undertake all leadership duties
- Full funding of a professional qualification for principals, vice-principals and senior leaders based on international standards, led by school leaders and based in real school activities is provided
- There should be ringfenced time dedicated to leadership CPD and networking and peer support opportunities
- Proactive measures should be taken to encourage greater underrepresented groups in leadership roles

As we look forward to the future conclusion and publication of the collaborative work of the TNC Review of the Impact of School Leader Workload, we present this NAHT report with the objective of reminding both government and employers of our expectation that positive, tangible change must be delivered if school leadership is to be at all sustainable.

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<sup>46</sup> NAHT (NI), 2021, Manifesto 2021/22



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