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## Pocket Watch – Easing the teacher workload

### Introduction

How do you know when a new policy priority is emerging? It's when all three major political Parties issue statements on the same issue in the same week. That's what's happened with teacher workloads this week, an issue that's been bubbling around for a long time, was raised at the recent Party Conferences and has now been the subject of announcements by all three Parties. You wait for one perhaps but at least the hope is that the new love-in with teachers may lead to some positive outcomes.

### What's the background?

The context may be political necessity but the reality is that the profession has faced a mountain of change and a barrage of new performance demands at a time when pay has remained low and expectations high. Earlier this summer, the OECD in its latest TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) reported that teachers worked on average a 38 hour week. Many argue that in this country at least, if you take in all the out of school hours, marking, lesson prep etc it's a lot more and in fairness, the Education Secretary has suggested it's more like 50 hours. And to rub salt into it, as OECD equally indicated in its survey, nearly 70% of teachers feel undervalued.

### So who's saying what?

As she indicated in her Conference speech, Nicky Morgan is keen to repair bridges by creating a new deal with teachers that would allow them to have time and energy *"to do what you do best - teach."* The approach being adopted and spelt out in a keynote speech by Nick Clegg this week is to launch a Workload Challenge, inviting teachers and other public sector workers such as nurses and social workers where the issue is just as acute, to highlight where the problems are and what could be done to make things better. For teachers this would be via a TES website over the next four weeks: *"we want you to tell us about what helps you manage your workload, what you think wastes your time, and what the government, schools and others should be doing to reduce unnecessary and unproductive workload."* The pledge is that on the basis of what may turn out to be a torrent of frontline evidence, the government *"will take action."*

For Labour, Shadow Minister Tristram Hunt revealed in a comment piece in the Guardian this week that he too wanted to *"nail the workload issue."* As a preface for this, he outlined four, what he called *"basic principles"* namely: a period of curriculum stability; a simpler common purpose around inspections, already under development; a much stronger focus on professional development; and *'sensible'* management, one where for example heads don't try to micro-manage but are constructive and supportive. He concluded by suggesting that modern technology should be able to make the teacher's life easier, an interesting challenge.

### And the reactions?

It's just over ten years since the last Workforce Agreement between professional bodies and government so perhaps time for a review. The ASCL for its part, has produced its own 10-point plan for reducing teacher workload, the NAHT has welcomed the announcement, the NAS has suggested it needs to be more than a cosmetic exercise; there's a lot hanging on it for all sides.



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