Developing sustainability for trainee teachers through workload management reform in the PGCE

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ABSTRACT

Workload has been identified as a major reason why teachers leave teaching and trainees leave Initial Teacher Education (ITE). In response, the Department for Education implemented initiatives (2016 onwards) to reform workload in teaching. Subsequently, the Centre for Teacher Education at the University of Warwick reviewed workload in the primary PGCE, implementing a range of university and school-based initiatives to reform the workload of a university-led, primary PGCE programme. Using a focus group methodology, this project explored the workload of PGCE trainees, evaluated initiatives implemented and sought future actions to support workload reform. The project found that trainees expected the workload of the PGCE to be high. Actual experiences of workload varied and trainees identified specific influential factors. A combination of personal, school-initiated and university-initiated strategies were found to be helpful in promoting a manageable workload. Culture was found to be an important concept and the culture of both University and schools was found to have an impact on workload, booth positively and negatively.

INTRODUCTION

The national context is one of challenges in teacher recruitment and retention (Foster, 2018; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018) particularly for early career teachers (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2018). Recent research highlights that 'Workload remains the most important factor influencing teachers' decisions to leave the profession' (CooperGibson Research, 2018) and this is also a long-standing issue in dropout from Initial Teacher Education (e.g. Chambers et al. 2002, Basit et al. 2004) To address this, the government has committed to tackle unnecessary workload, including commissioning reports from an 'Independent Teacher Workload Review Group (DfE, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c), commissioning subsequent research, summarised by Robinson and Pedder (2018) and an action plan to reduce teacher workload (DfE, 2017).

The workload issues identified are relevant to Initial Teacher Education (ITE) as well as schools as the same issues affect trainee teachers. Indeed, the Independent Teacher Workload Review Group reports also identified implications for ITE. However, this content was relegated to the end of the document and was very limited, restricted to around three bullet points.

Given the limited guidance around workload reform in ITE, the Centre for Teacher Education undertook its own review of workload within the PGCE. For the academic years 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 an increasing range of initiatives was implemented. This included initiatives to manage coursework and workload associated with school placements as well as supporting trainees' wellbeing. Based upon this work, the project lead was invited to submit a case study of good practice to the Department for Education (DfE) subsequently published in: 'Addressing teacher workload in Initial Teacher Education' in November 2018. The project lead also gave invited talks at two DfE events to promote the issue of 'Addressing Workload in ITE' in London and Sheffield (December 2018).

The main aims of the project were to:

- evaluate initiatives in the Primary PGCE in response to the workload reform agenda;

- recognise and disseminate good practice;

- further embed good practice into Warwick School Partnership.

The intended legacy of the project is to: embed sustainable working practices for trainee teachers and offer the potential for longer-term impact for these trainees as they become newly qualified teachers and early career teachers; there is also potential for impact on current teachers in Partnership schools involved in the project.

METHODOLOGY

Mixed methodology of questionnaire and focus group data.

The methodology was largely qualitative with a small amount of quantitative data. Qualitative data was gathered through focus group methodology. Trainee focus groups took place as working lunches on days when trainees were normally in University (this was the participants' preferred option as it limited travelling and made best use of their time). Mentor focus groups were held during an afternoon with supply cover paid to school to release Mentors.

To elicit evaluative information about trainee teachers' perceptions of all workload reduction measures, during the focus group they were given a summary list of measures currently implemented in the PGCE programme. They reflected upon these individually before sharing their views and ranked them via a Likert scale.

Quantitative data was gathered via the Likert scale used to prompt discussion in the focus groups (as above) and questionnaires (1 question only, as a part of a larger online questionnaire which is completed by the whole cohort as part of their course) which asks all trainees to assess their confidence 'to successfully manage the workload of the PGCE programme'. This questionnaire (and individual question) was completed at the beginning, middle and end of the research to offer contextual data for the whole cohort. Gathering data at 3 points within the programme indicated developing views of the whole cohort.

The focus group interviews with (a) school Mentors and (b) trainees gathered information about:

• how trainees coped with workload on school placements;

• how trainees coped with the academic work of the PGCE programme;

• the impact of workload reduction measures implemented in the Primary PGCE;

• trainee teachers' evaluative perceptions of workload reduction measures on their professional placements in schools;

• partnership school Mentors perceptions of school responses to workload reduction initiatives;

• partnership school attitudes and responses to workload reduction initiatives to support trainees.

• school Mentors experiences of the workload of the Mentoring role

This report focuses upon findings from the trainee focus groups. 2 trainee focus groups were formed with approximately 8 participants in each. This number varied from focus group to focus group with attendance as follows.

Focus Group	No. of participants Group 1	No. of participants Group 2	Notes on membership
1 (October)	9	8	Between Focus Group 1 & 2, two trainees in Group 2 withdrew from the course
2 (December)	9	7	For Focus Group 2, one trainee who had asked for longer to consider, approached the researcher and asked to attend and joined Focus Group 2.
3 (March)	6	5	2 trainees sent apologies, citing pressures of work at this point.
4 (July)	8	6	

Table 1: Number of participants per focus group

Membership of Group 1 was reasonably stable throughout the four focus groups, although there was a dip in attendance for both groups after PP3. Two trainees specifically cited workload pressures at this point (including applying for jobs) when sending apologies and other trainees chose not to attend, perhaps for similar reasons. Attendance of group 2 fluctuated more although there was a hard-core of three trainees who attended every single focus group and another three trainees who attended three of the four focus groups.

One focus group was always led by the principal investigator. As the principal investigator was also a tutor on the course, the potential for bias with trainees reporting more positively, was recognised. To enable comparison and try to ascertain whether such bias was present, the second focus group was always led by other staff in the Centre for Teacher Education (none of whom had teaching contact with the PGCE trainees).

Stratification of the original sample included the following:

	Numbers within each strata n=19		
Stratification		Stratification	
Primary Pathway	14	Early Years Pathway	5
Female	16	Male	3
Non-mature	14	Mature (26+)	5
Majority ethnic group	16	Minority ethnic group	3
Non-disability	18	Disability	1
Table 2. Stratification of the sample			
NB some trainees belonged to more than one group.			

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Full ethical approval was granted via the HSSREC committee before commencement of data gathering. Consent:

Sampling of trainees: a stratified random sample of trainees was identified. The strata included: male/female; identified disability; ethnicity (majority/ minority) and mature students (those aged 26+ since the majority of full-time postgraduates are 25 and under (HEFCE)).

A random number generator in 'R' was used to select the random sample. Rejection sampling ensured that the samples include the relevant proportions of each strata.

Sampling of School Mentors: a random sample of 3 mentors per placement was identified using random sampling (random number generation as above).

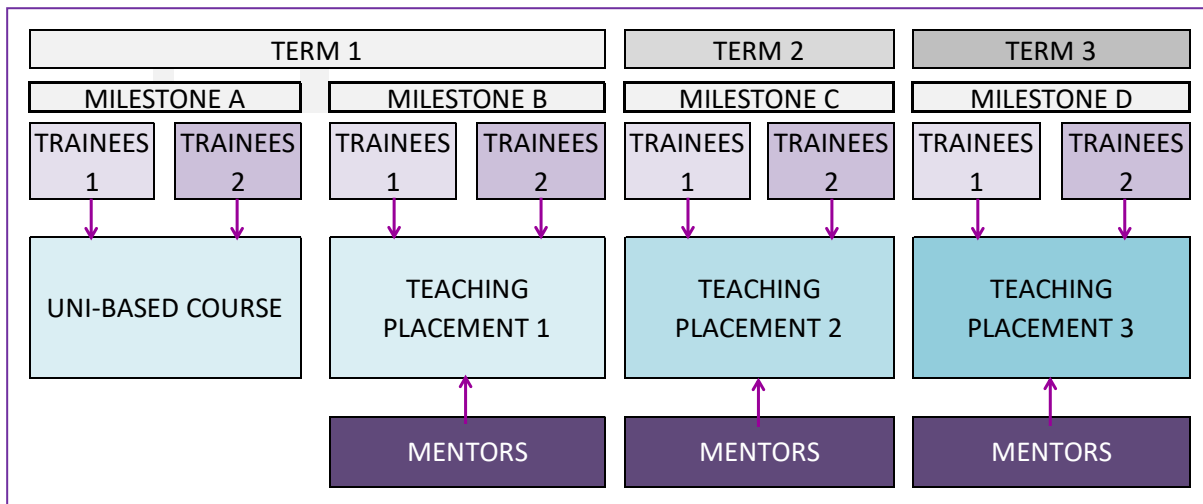The project was implemented with milestones as in Figure 1, below:

Figure 1: Timeline of project implementation

Data analysis

All focus groups were transcribed; transcriptions were checked against the audio files for accuracy and then the data was thematically coded using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. The coding frame was based upon the original focus group questions and was therefore largely deductive. However, some inductive coding allowed for the emergence of unexpected themes e.g. 'culture'.

Quantitative data was simply analysed to generate means to allow comparison, for example of popular workload management initiatives. Variance from the mean was visible through the display of raw data in the data tables.

RESULTS

Data was gathered and analysed regarding a range of areas including: trainees' experiences of workload in university; trainees' experiences of workload on their placements; their perceptions of work life balance; their feelings about their capacity to manage their workload; personal strategies they used to manage their workload; and their views of other strategies either university- initiated or school-initiated. There was too much to include in this report so the focus will be on addressing the main aim of the research project i.e. evaluating initiatives in the primary PGCE in response to the workload with full agenda.

Workload in the University-based element of the PGCE.

Data in this section is drawn from the first focus group, which took place at the end of a 7-week University-based period of study (which incorporated 9 days on a observational serial school placement -1 or 2 days a week). Trainees were asked to reflect upon the initial expectations about workload on a PGCE programme that they had held before they began the course. Eight trainees (four in each group) responded to this question and they all identified **negative expectations around workload**, for example:

> *'I was expecting, like, a lot of work and a lot more pressure. [I was told]… oh, it's going to be really hard to balance, like, social life with, like, teaching, with going to Uni and there's going to be, like, massive amounts of, like, work to actually do…'* (Focus Group 1)

> *'Don't think you can have a life, 'cause you can't do this and that, yeah. Yeah, say goodbye to your social life. I've heard that a lot.* (Focus Group 2)

> *'Everyone I know who's done it recently has said it's been very hard to have, like, work/life balance.'* (Focus Group 2)

Trainees' expectations of workload associated with the **job of teaching** were also elicited. Around five trainees in Group 2 identified a number of negative expectations regarding workload in teaching. These encompassed how *'you would literally spend hours on numbers.. data'* and *'so many different forms'* and that this was an issue of the English education system. Pay in relation to workload was also raised by two trainees e.g. *'There's a teacher shortage… because the workload is so bad and the pay isn't enough for the amount of work that you do….'*. There was also an awareness that the job of teaching, *'doesn't necessarily switch off when you get home.'* And a general expectation voiced by six members of Group 2 that you would bring work home in the evening or at the weekend.

Threes trainees in Group 1 also expected that the job of the teacher would be challenging, *'there's definitely a lot expected.'* or *'a lot involved'*, but this was balanced against the benefits of the job.

Five trainees across Groups 1 and 2 recognised that whilst the NQT year will be challenging, teaching will get easier:

> *'…once you do it on the course, then your NQT year, they will be the most stressful times and literally it's a career that once you're in it for longer, you've got old resources to pull on, you know, you're just more in the swing of it and you're more comfortable.'* (Focus Group 1)

Trainees in Group2 recognised that there was a degree of choice in workload. You can choose how hard you want to work:

'…you can decide how much work you put in, which I know sounds bad, but if you're going to be an excellent teacher, you're going to put a lot more work in than if you're like a mediocre teacher…'(Focus Group 2)

Group 2 also recognised that *'..the best teacher isn't necessarily the one doing the most work…'* and that it was about working *'smartly'*. You can also choose where you want to work and that *'the right school'* can have an impact on workload. This encompassed both *'school ethos and the way they manage each other and themselves'* and school size, where there was a perception of greater planning support in a three-form entry school in comparison to a one-form entry school.

As one might expect from trainees who have chosen this career pathway, there was reference in both groups to the positive factors that had attracted them to teaching in the first place, such as

'…it's just such a rewarding job and it's a vocation … you put your heart and soul into it…' (Focus Group 1)

'Trainee A: *No two days are the same.*

Trainee B: *Yeah, that excites me that. That's what I want to do.'* (Focus Group 1)

And so, ultimately, 'there's a lot involved, but it's just so worthwhile.'. (Focus Group 1)

Summary

- **Trainees in both groups seemed to expect that the workload of a PGCE would be challenging, likewise the workload of involved in the job of teaching.**

- **Some trainees in both groups expressed the view that teaching will get easier over time.**

- **Trainees in Group 2 also recognised a degree of choice in workload; the concept of working 'smartly' was introduced and also that 'the right school' can have an impact on workload.**

Trainees' experiences of managing the workload of the university-based induction to the PGCE programme

The extent to which trainees contributed to a particular question varied from group to group. In Group 1, four trainees commented on the workload to-date for the University-based element of the programme; one trainee was positive about the workload *'I feel like everyone's, kind of, like, taken to it really well.'* whilst the other three were more neutral e.g. *'so far, I have been doing it though, yeah, I would say it's not been too bad.'* Similarly in group 2, two trainees were positive e.g. *''I feel like, so far, it's been quite manageable, everything…'*, whilst four trainees were more neutral with for example two trainees recognising that the workload varied *'…about two weeks ago I would say, no, I wasn't confident [with managing the workload]but I feel more comfortable now'.* Three trainees recognised working hard in the week, but having time off at the weekend.

Summary

- **Trainees' experiences of managing the workload varied from individual to individual, and from time to time. Most trainees might be seen as neutral (expressing both positive and negative views), whilst three were more positive about managing the workload of the university-based element of the programme.**

Evaluation of initiatives to manage the workload of the university-based induction to the PGCE

A number of initiatives to help trainee teachers manage the workload in the university-based elements of their PGCE have been implemented. This section reflects on any of these initiatives that trainees recognise as **having a positive impact on their progress or ability to manage their workload.**

Trainees recognised a number of strategies and these included development of the **planning forms** (one trainee); five trainees across both Groups 1 and 2 recognised that the required content of the **e-PDP (electronic portfolio of reflections)** had been reduced; one trainee showed awareness that the **timetabled day** was typically shorter than previously, with three trainees recognising how challenging it was to learn later in the day; seven trainees across both groups commented positively on the value of **self-study days/time built into the timetable** or the explicitly identified assignment writing week.

Trainees recognised and commented upon a range of other university-based strategies which were pre-existing and so not analysed as part of the above section on current initiatives. They are, however, worthy of mention as strategies to be continued. 3 trainees appreciated the **well-structured programme**, *'It's very, like, set out from the beginning as well, like, where we're going to be going, what your next steps are, where you're going next with this…' and, 'There's a lot to think about, but it is well structured…'.* In particular four trainees appreciated the advance information regarding assessment and other deadlines. Three trainees discussed the usefulness of the Friday bulletin in managing workload. A total of 11 trainees across both groups commented or agreed that **support from staff** was positive in supporting manageability of workload. Students acknowledged that there was '*a lot of support*' and recognised an '*open door policy, so you can just go and ask and they're always there for you…' (Group 1).* Group 2 explicitly linked support to workload:

Speaker A:	*'So in terms of, yeah, managing workload, obviously, they're not going to do it for you but in terms of the stress it will give you, that's…*
Speaker B:	*Guide, guidance*
Speaker C	*Yeah, definitely.*
Speaker A:	*Yeah. If they weren't so supportive, it would be completely different…' (Focus Group 1)*

Four trainees (group 1 and 2) recognised the **optional assignment-writing workshops** as helpful.

Factors which impacted negatively on workload

Whilst discussing their experiences of workload, trainees highlighted areas which they felt constituted unnecessary workload in this phase of the programme. Examples include **pre-course tasks**, and **preparatory tasks** for some seminars. Concerns about the pre-course tasks included tone, amount and then repetition upon commencing the PGCE:

…it was very strict wording of, it is compulsory reading…'

'I felt so stressed about it. I was trying to work full time and do i. …I was very overwhelmed by the size of the booklet, 'cause I thought, oh I'll print it out and I realised how many pages later it was'

'there's some things that we were reading through and then I remember turning up at the first few seminars thinking, oh it's a good job I've read this, 'cause they're not going to go over this and then we literally spent the first couple of seminars doing it exactly, and I was, like, oh, well if I'd have known that, I wouldn't have got so worked up about it…'

Concerns about **preparatory tasks** for some seminars included the **time demands**, and **not seeing the point of the task:**

> *'…sometimes I just think some of the tasks do take a bit more time than people think and, like, time is a bit precious for all of us, so sometimes those things do add up, even if it's, like, once a week, or whatever, it's just still time.'*

> *'…for [subject] like, we have, like, a lot of reading, like, pre-reading and we didn't go over any of it in the lesson, like, she didn't even ask about it, but, like, we'd done so much reading … then it wasn't even asked so I was, like, what was the point…?' (Focus Group 1)*

However, trainees did not dismiss such tasks out of hand, rather they qualified statements by identifying the nature of tasks which had been helpful and for which the workload was therefore justifiable, or how reading could be made more focused and productive.

> *Speaker A:* *'When we did reading for the [specified session], I thought that was great, 'cause we had the whole lesson on it and it was obviously interesting that we all got to have a focus and we all discussed it in creating a poster, so that's fab, but, being honest, the other ones we've done before that, to me, just…like, a couple of hours that I could put to better use.*

> *Speaker B:* *I completely agree, yeah.'*

> *Speaker C:* *…or even like, really brief, so as in just make, like, a couple of bullet points, because …there was one that was, like, a 20-page document but then we spent five minutes in the seminar just quickly talking through what we'd read, so we didn't need to read 20 pages to do that five minutes of talking, it could have just been a couple of bullet points to make sure you know, so maybe more direction would be good. (Focus Group 1)*

Some trainees identified demands external to the program which affected their ability to manage their workload, these included **part-time work**, which trainees identified as unavoidable, and **commuting**.

Summary

- **Trainees identified a number of both current and pre-existing workload strategies as positive in supporting management of workload. In descending order, these were: support from staff (11), self-study days in the timetable (7), reduction in required content of the e-PDP (5), assignment writing workshops (4), well-structured program (3), shorter days (1), new planning forms (1). Positive identification suggests that these strategies are worth retaining.**

- **Specific issues identified as impacting negatively upon workload included pre-course tasks, and preparatory tasks for seminars, and these are worthy of review.**

From this point on in program, the majority of the trainees' time was spent in school on one of three placements. The focus will now shift to considerations of workload issues on school block placements PP2, PP3 and PP4 and data in this section is drawn from the focus group held at the end of each block placement in December, March and July.

Trainees' experiences of managing the workload of the school-based elements of the PGCE programme

Whilst the focus of this section is the evaluation of university initiatives to support the trainees' management of workload, to offer some context, a brief summary of the trainees' self-reported capacity to cope with the workload of their school-based placements is offered. To achieve this, trainees' responses to several questions were collated and then their responses were judged to be either positive, neutral or negative about their experiences of managing their workload on each placement. This data is recorded in Table 3 below.

	No of trainees per classification Groups 1 & 2		
	POSITIVE	NEUTRAL	NEGATIVE
PP2 (5 weeks/ teaching up to 60% of the timetable)	7	6	3
PP3 (6 weeks/ teaching up to 70% of the timetable)	4	1	6
PP4 (8 weeks/ teaching up to 80% of the timetable)	8	3	3
Table 3: An assessment of trainees' self-reported capacity to cope with the workload of school placements			

The *majority* of trainees appeared to be able to manage their workload (judged as either positive or neutral). Trainees' reports overall, are less positive for PP3, though it is not obvious why and these focus groups had the lowest attendance of all focus groups, which may be a related factor.

Even though the *majority* of trainees appeared to be able to manage their workload (either positive or neutral), all trainees identified **specific workload issues**, either placement or programme related. These are summarised in Table 4.

	No. of trainees agreeing this factor was a workload issue						
	PP2		PP3		PP4		TOTAL
WORKLOAD ISSUE	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2	
Training tasks	4	5					9
Marking	1		1	1			3
Duplication of work e.g. completing 2 copies of planning	1			2			3
Paperwork e.g. planning format and evaluations	1	2	2	2			7
Resource preparation		1	1	4	1		7
Working beyond stipulated %		1		1			2
Assignment	2	5					7
Added Post PP3							

Change of age-phase/curriculum	╱	╱	1	2	2		5
Added Post PP4							
SATs/Moderation	╱	╱	╱	╱	1		1
Lack of support/poor relationships with colleagues	╱	╱	╱		1	1	2
Table 4: Specific workload issues identified by trainees across school placements PP2, PP3, PP4.							

Some exemplification of trainees' workload challenges is offered below:

PP2:

One trainee suggested a more negative experience of workload, identifying specific workload stressors:

'I found the marking was quite a lot, like, every lunchtime and after, I'd have to stay quite late to do all the marking, so, for me, that was quite tough.' (Group 1)

Where trainees were coping with the core placement demands of planning and teaching, training tasks were the main workload stressor for both groups of trainees on this placement:

'I was the same as that. So, I, like, in terms of workload, as in, like, planning and actually, like, getting your marking and everything done, but that was all fine, but, yeah, the training tasks, like, having to go and observe, like, so many classes, or, like, do phonics when you're in Key Stage 2, like, I found, like, when we were meant to be in, like, 50% teaching, I was, like, but, I need to go and observe four phonics lessons and teach one and be in these year groups to do the talk and English, so it was, like, really hard to, like, get that balance because then, you're not in your own class enough, if that makes sense.' (Group 1)

PP3:

One trainee was more neutral, workload was '*fine'* but the fact that the trainee was '*very thankful once I'd finished'* suggests the workload was challenging. This was attributed to the major change of age-phase, which required much adaptation:

'..think there was a big change [of age-phase], and I think…we all knew it was going to be, like, a lot more work but it still, kind of, hit us like a ton of bricks, I think, and just a change in everything…' (Group 1)

One trainee was negative about the PP2 workload describing it as '*horrendous'* this was attributed to the detailed planning (this trainee did not progress to weekly planning) and resource preparation (the TA was too busy to help):

'I was quite slow writing things up and things, 'cause I wasn't used to writing up the plans in great detail and I was writing so much, so I just found that it was hard..'. (Group 1)

PP4

One trainee made the link between poor relationships, stress, pressure and workload:

'you've got to then handle the stress of that, sort of, not good relationship between your mentor and where that's supposed to be the support, it's supposed to come from them or your class teacher, but when you don't have that, you, kind of, feel like all the pressure is on you and then your workload then tends to struggle.' (Group 2)

Summary:

- **Particular challenges to workload on placements included training tasks (PP2 only), paperwork (PP2 and PP3), resource preparation (all placements) and change of age phase/curriculum.**

Evaluation of university-initiated strategies to support workload management

To evaluate the impact of University strategies to manage workload, trainees were provided with a grid of strategies to rate (Likert scale rating system) and to prompt discussion. This data is summarised across the three placements to identify any trends in trainees' views.

To what extent did the following contribute to **being able to manage your workload**	PP2		PP3		PP4	
Item to rate	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-study slots/assignment writing days on the timetable	4.7	0.6	4.8	0.4	4.6	0.6
Time-line of tasks (e.g. when assignments and self-study tasks are due in;	3.8	1	3.4	0.5	4.3	1
Awareness-raising about workload reform in teaching e.g. in planning session and assessment session	3.7	0.6	3.6	0.5	4.2	0.7
Introduction to **'lean lesson planning'**	3.2	1	4	0.6	3.8	1
Guidance to schools/trainees on **shared PPA time and 'guided supported planning'** in Placement Guides	3.7	1.1	4	0.6	4	1
Guidance on **Placement teaching load** and gradual build-up of teaching in **placement guide**;	4	1	4	0.9	4.4	0.6
Tips on manageability in Placement Guides	4.3	1.2	3.8	1	3.6	0.8
Reference to the **Independent Teacher Workload Review Group** documents in the **Placement guides**;	1.5	1.2	3.4	1	3.9	0.9
Wellbeing emphasis in the PGCE programme e.g. 5-a-day; Lecture on mental health/wellbeing; ISPs to support individual needs; post-placement reflection sessions; individual tutorials with personal tutors.	3.5	1	4	0.9	3.5	1.1
Weekly planning forms and advice to move to weekly planning as soon as possible on PP3/4			5	0	4.6	0.6
Removal of requirement for **written lesson evaluations on PP4**					5	0
Slightly reduced teaching load on PP4 this year (2 weeks at 80%/slightly slower build-up).					4.9	0.3

Table 5: Summary of Likert scale ratings of workload reduction initiatives after each block placement

Colour coding the mean scores for each initiative allows the reader to see at-a-glance the most popular strategies. However, by PP4, even the least popular strategy (well-being emphasis) received a relatively

positive score of 3.5, indicating that by the end of the program trainees found that all initiatives contributed to workload management.

In the second focus group/after the first block placement (PP2) it is noticeable that there is a higher variability in means (from 1.5 to 4.7) and higher standard deviations (most being one or more) indicating that there was a range of responses from trainees. To explain this, it is possible that the descriptions of initiatives were less clear then they should have been, and noteworthy in the focus group discussion was the trainees' lack of understanding of what these university-based initiatives were. Group 2, in particular, spent most of this section of the focus group actually asking what each of the strategies was, rather than discussing them. Group 1 showed a little more awareness but still had some queries. Variation in mean scores from PP2 might indicate a growing awareness of the strategy and/or variation in trainees attending the focus groups.

The most popular initiatives appeared to be:

- **Self-study slots** on the timetable (popular at all three sampling points);

- **weekly planning forms**, a feature of PP3 and PP4;

- **removal of the requirement for written lesson evaluations** – PP4 only (universally popular as indicated by standard deviation of zero);

- **slightly reduced teaching load** on PP4;

- **guidance on placement teaching load**;

- **guidance to schools on shared PPA time**.

Initially a popular strategy (for PP2) was **tips on manageability** in the placement guides. However the popularity of this strategy decreases with each placement, perhaps because these tips did not change over time and trainees were already familiar with them.

To further understand these scores, illustrative data from the focus groups is included here.

There was more discussion around weekly planning in both groups. Trainees felt this was particularly beneficial because in addition to reducing workload, it was similar to how they expected to plan in their NQT year, it was a more sustainable approach, it was easier to plan and see the progression in the planning and it was more flexible, '*it's just what you want to achieve in a week and then some days you do more and some days you do less, but by the end of the week, you've still covered what you wanted to.*' (Group 2)

The removal of the requirement for written evaluations was popular and described by one trainee as follows:

'*I think, for me, the biggest thing was the removal of the written lesson evaluations, because they took up so much of my time, that was the best thing. …'cause you're evaluating yourself, because you're thinking, okay, tomorrow I'm going to do this or I'm going to do that and in discussion with the class teacher and then it's just the time it takes to write it down and you get to the end and you think, this is really a waste of my time, because I'm still reflecting all the time, I'm reflecting with my mentor and I'm, sort of, evaluating everything I do anyway, 'cause you're so concerned about your performance in a way, that, yeah, that was the biggest thing for me.*' (Group 2)

Group 1 trainees discussed the guided, supported planning and shared PPA time: a University expectation of schools. Two trainees reflected on previous placements experiences where they had planned lessons at home and sent them to their class teachers for '*scrutiny*', '*so you might have done the same thing about three times and present in different ways, to still have done the one lesson.*' Shared planning in PPA time was then seen as more time efficient, '*That's probably where, like, having the opportunity to just*

have a conversation with your class teacher at the start of your planning, so you … know you're on the right track and then you do your planning…'

'… in PP3, I didn't really have guided planning, so I'd sit there, like, in PPA time listening, then have to go home and then plan, so it wasn't PPA time, whereas in PP4, you know, I had that set afternoon and my mentor was my class teacher, …they know what they want for their class, they know how it all works and they know you as well, because you're constantly having that chat backward and forward, so I was then able to sit there and plan most of my lessons and not have to then go home. Obviously, I'd have to print off resources, do bits and bobs, but not have to sit at home, like, right, I need to now plan, yeah, I think it makes a lot of difference.' (Group 2)

Support from the class teacher also extended to modelling for one Group 2 trainee: *'there were points when my class teacher would say, oh, I'll make sure I do this, so I can model it to you. …And that was such an important thing for my development*.' (Group 2)

Post PP3, the most popular strategy appears to be the introduction of weekly planning. Particularly noteworthy as four trainees manually added this to the list and accorded it the top grade.

Trainee A: *'…when I went on to the weekly plans, it was much easier to follow through and follow the lesson all the way through.'*

Trainee B: *'Absolutely.'*

Trainee A: *'So I would have preferred to do that straight from the beginning.'*

As on PP2, Self-study slots/assignment writing days on the timetable, remain very popular. However, all strategies now seem equally popular with lean lesson planning; Guidance to schools/trainees on shared PPA time and 'guided supported planning' in Placement Guides; Guidance on Placement teaching load and gradual build-up of teaching in placement guide; and the wellbeing emphasis in the programme equally popular. This data is of course not entirely comparable as it is based on responses from 1 group.

Furthermore three trainees in Group 1 identified the wellbeing emphasis in the programme to be 'patronising' and unnecessary, 'I've learnt how to, you know, de-stress and I will use those channels, I don't suddenly need two hours' worth of lectures telling me how to relax, like, I've got my vent'. Another trainee in Group 1 suggested this input could be optional and another suggested that personal tutors fulfilled this function. As indicated by the high standard deviation, there is variability in this view, and means of 3.5 – 4, suggest that this strategy is liked by some.

Summary:

- **Popular strategies included Self-study slots on the timetable (popular at all three sampling points); weekly planning forms, a feature of PP3 and PP4, with a suggestion that these could be introduced earlier; removal of the requirement for written lesson evaluations at PP4; slightly reduced teaching load on PP4; guidance on placement teaching load; guidance to schools on shared PPA time.**

What else could be done to support workload manageability?

Trainees in both groups had their own ideas about what else could be done to support workload management. These are summarised below in Table 6.

Other strategies	No. of trainees citing						Exemplification
	PP2		PP3		PP4		
	Group 1 n=9	Group 2 n=7	Group 1 n=6	Group 2 n=5	Group 1 n=8	Group 2 n=6	
Explicit guidance on not duplicating work	2			1			'…a lot more clarity … you don't have to duplicate every…da da da da. I don't feel really that was really pointed out.'
Review training tasks e.g. less emphasis on them or explain them more	1						'Just the training tasks for me. I don't think the training tasks, I think they need to have, like, less of an emphasis, or talk about it more…'
More discussion of placement expectations/content of Placement Guide	2						
Clarification of week by week section of placement guide e.g. what is mandatory/optional		3					'a few of us … we wrote a tick list for each week, tick off you've had a mentor meeting, ..It would be great if the University had done that'. 'for each week, I went through the booklet and bullet-pointed about five or six things for each week … that way… rather than look at a big A4 sheet of, like, loads of things, it was, like, broken down.'
Started assignment earlier/greater awareness of it/more support		4			4		'I would have liked to have had the essay in sooner before placement and started work on it earlier. That would have made a massive difference to me.'
Additions after PP3							
Advice on where to find key resources/ free schemes e.g. White Rose			1	3			'Where to find key resources.' (PP3)
More consistent support from schools				3			'it would be good if they [schools] were, you know, a bit more consistent or a bit more in tune with what the University does.' (PP3) 'It stems from that doesn't it?' (PP3)
Additions after PP4							
Implement weekly planning earlier					1		
workload as a standing item for shared reflection in the post-						2	

placement reflection sessions with the personal tutor.	╱	╱	╱	╱		
Reducing pressure to achieve 'high' grades	╱	╱	╱	╱	5	

Table 6. Suggestions of 'What else might be done to help trainees manage workload.

Trainees made a number of suggestions to support manageability of workload. Whilst the numbers in the tables may not suggest a huge consensus, where a suggestion appears in both groups independently this might suggest more consensus on a particular issue. Strategies which also concur with workload issues identified earlier might also be worthy of particular attention.

Summary

- **Strategies raised in more than one group or which relate to workload issues raised earlier, which might be worthy of particular attention include: include explicit guidance on not duplicating work; reviewing training tasks (particularly on PP2); further consideration of assignment support; advice on where to find key resources; and promoting consistency of support from schools.**

The impact of culture on workload

An issue that wasn't specifically asked about, but which nevertheless was a feature of the trainees responses was an explicit recognition of the **impact on workload of school culture**. There were also references to **University cultures**. The concept of culture as an issue in workload is identified in all focus groups, but not necessarily explicitly.

Culture can be defined as *'how we do things here' (*Southworth, 2014:1) and school and university cultures were seen to have an impact on workload, both positively and negatively.

In the initial baseline focus groups, where students stated their expectations of high workloads in both the PGCE and teaching, the acculturation of students into the norm of high workloads can be seen in trainees' expressions of guilt when not working:

Trainee A: *'I get home from Uni if I'm not working, or if I'm not doing my other job, whatever, you, sort of, sit there and you feel guilty in a way…'*

Trainee B: *'Yeah, definitely feel guilty.'* (Group 1)

However, counter to this, the university culture of workload reform is recognised by one trainee, at least, as having some impact:

'I think it's something that's implemented into us as Warwick trainees, like, straight away, though, like, the whole, like, workload and management, I think, because it's implemented now, they just carry that through to the NQT and further up…' (Group 1)

Following PP2, trainees identified how the way the school did things had an impact on their workload. For example the marking practices in one school contributed to a positive experience regarding workload and work life balance for one trainee:

'there's not that much marking, because if you flick through their books and they've done the LO, then you just put a green mark and that's it done, so I literally never found myself staying later than, like, half four.' (Group 1)

This contrasted with the experience of another trainee where the perceived school expectations led to a challenging workload on PP2

'I was, like, well, sometimes I work 'til about 8/9 o'clock and they were, like, yeah, that's normal. …So they were expecting me to be there before eight, I was the last one out and they were expecting me to work 'til 8/9 o'clock at night, so I had completely the opposite experience…' (Group 1)

One trainee explicitly refers to university culture of support, which helped to ameliorate the stresses of the PGCE programme.

*'For me, what has been nice though, …knowing that the University is at least, it has a **culture** of, we are aware of how hard this is and we do want to help you if we can, knowing that that's their attitude, is, to me, [oh yeah] helpful, …so, at least knowing that when I am back here, I can speak to people and they genuinely want to know if I'm okay, does make a difference to how I feel.'* (Group 1)

Following PP3, the trainees, now more experienced in schools, discussed the impact of schools' support cultures – explicitly recognised here by trainees as a ***'supportive ethos'***, this was also recognised as beneficial to the trainee's experience and their workload, as in the discussion of one school below:

Trainee A: *'…it was just having support, by doing PPA's with my teachers …and just having support and …they gave me time to reflect on my lessons, they gave me time to observe other teachers, they were really proactive about that'.*

Trainee B: *'They are really good there, like, the actual, like, like the whole support…'*

Trainee C: *'The school ethos…'*

Trainee B: *'Yeah…'*

Trainee C: *'…is very supportive.'*

Trainee B: *'… the mentor there, she's great and, honestly, she speaks with the class teacher to make sure that they know…. this is what a student needs to do …it makes your workload so much less when you don't have to, like, be, like, constantly asking.*

And again, exactly as on PP2, school expectations e.g. to produce a separate plan for the teaching assistant and the lack of support e.g. not received guided supported planning from the class teacher, led to a challenging workload on PP3, '*I was, sort of, left to just get on with it really…'(Group 1).*

Following PP3, there was also some suggestions by trainees that the culture of workload reform developed by the University may not be fully embedded. Trainees identified some examples of different expectations or interpretations from university staff. This became more apparent on PP3, [perhaps because trainees themselves are more aware of expectations, but was only discussed in Group 1.

'I think, another thing to do with, like, workload, was, like, the folders and, like, the amount we're expected to do in the folders, 'cause I know that…like, when my link tutor, …came to look at my folder, (s)he was, like, ah that's all fab, like, all great, but … a couple of my friends had [a different link tutor] and (s)he really criticised their folders and said that they needed to do lots more but they'd done the same amount as I had…'(Group 1)

'I think that definitely depends on your link tutor, 'cause I've had a few people that have said that [their link tutor] told them off for not doing individual plans, but when I spoke to [my link tutor] and said that all I'd been doing was weekly planning [my link tutor] said, yeah, that's absolutely fine, 'cause that's thinking as a teacher, so I definitely think there's like a massive, like, differentiation between the way that link tutors are, like, the information they're providing.' (Group 1)

In PP4, there was some explicit recognition by six of the eight trainees in Group 1 of the concept and influence of school culture, although this term wasn't used. Instead, trainees used words like 'ethos' and 'attitude' and phrases like 'way of doing things', all of which can be associated with culture.

The first reference which can be associated with school culture occurs just 1 ½ minutes into the focus group:

> *'…they didn't really want you to plan that much at the school, they had a different way of doing things… so they were just, like, you shouldn't waste time on the planning, so, yeah, it was way better.'* (Group 1)

The school's 'way of doing things' or culture around workload was felt by this trainee to have a positive impact on her placement, 'it was way better', a point reiterated throughout the focus group.

A little further on, as part of the discussion around weekend working, another trainee who enjoyed her placement recognised the encouragement of the teachers to have time off at the weekend:

'it was nice to have a bit of free time and teachers really pushed me to do it. They said you can stay here late in the week, but please have your weekends and they actually want to talk to you on the playground about your weekend and stuff, so I think it's crucial.' (Group 1)

When asked about any differences between this and the previous placement (PP3 and PP4) the concept and impact of 'ethos' was introduced:

'I just found the attitude of, so, obviously I've been in lots of different schools and the way they work is very different. The way this particular school worked, the, kind of, ethos, and attitudes really fit with me. …they'd go, make sure you have some time for yourself at the weekend, you know, try not to be here until, you know, 6 o'clock tonight, try and get out early and they were very much about helping me to manage that so that I could have a life outside of everything that was going on and I found that so much better, which is probably why I enjoyed this placement so much more, because I felt, like, it wasn't, oh, here I am again until really late at night and giving up everything else, it was, I'm doing this and I'm loving it, but I'm also getting the other things out of my life that I want to….'. (Group 1)

Again, both the concept of school ethos or culture around workload, and the support offered by the school to achieve this was seen by this trainee to have a positive impact on her placement. As part of this same conversation, 2 other trainees made reference to concepts associated with culture:

'I think, yeah, the attitude of, like, the people you work with definitely, 'cause, like, my PP3, …the whole school stayed late, so therefore I automatically stayed late but then, like, on my PP4, like, my teacher would come in and she would most often leave before me and she'd be, like, oh, my spies are watching you, don't stay too late, so, like, it was that kind of attitude as well, which makes you feel like, you, kind of, almost get things done quicker, …and I think, if the whole school's got that attitude, you will, kind of, take that on as well and it makes it a lot easier.' (Group 1)

Again, school culture is recognised as having a direct impact on the trainee. However, a manageable culture around workload wasn't always seen as a good thing. In recognising the impact of school ethos, another trainee described the school context where it was suggested that this has gone too far. This was seen by the trainee to be detrimental both to the pupils and the trainee's opportunities on placement.

'In relation to how it's obviously relevant to the course is, it's just something to watch, in terms of what to consider when students do go on their placements, how much of a difference that ethos of a school can make, 'cause, in the inverse of what you two are saying, this one, …I felt like I was a bit idle at times… the whole school ethos was very much just, sort of, like, they'd tilted it too far the other way of this is our life, let's have all of it, but then at the end of the day, it's got to the point where, actually, the education of the children is suffering, because you're all enjoying your time so much, … and you need to put a little bit more in.' (Group 1)

The final trainees referenced **'expectations'** around time in school which were very different to her more positive workload experiences of previous placements:

'…the expectation was to get there at, like, half seven and be there 'til six, half six. Like, I can remember leaving at, like, half five, and they were, like, oh my God, like, you left early and I'm, like, is half five early? Like, that, to me, is, like, late really, like, not early, like it's later than I've left on any of my other placements.

In Group 2, the trainees recognised the enormous importance of the context of your placement school on your own progress, comparing notes on placements past and present. One trainee, whose placement has been challenging suggested that her progress was affected by how "*comfortable*", you feel in your placement school, supported by another trainee who agreed that "*if I'm stressed, I'm not just good at managing* (workload)".

Two trainees recognised that the school needed to legitimise workload reduction measures:

Trainee A: *'they were, like, if you don't need to do it, don't' do it and that was it and it was, like, oh my gosh, it's common sense, but not that common and it made the world of difference, so yeah.*

Trainee B: *'Cause when you're in that mind set it's less common sense to you because you're so stuck in your one day of thinking but you actually need someone to tell you what to do'* (Group 2)

The trainees recognised that they learned from the way their teachers did things, as well as modelling how to teach, teachers at least implicitly modelled workload :

Trainee A: *my class teacher, she was in at 6 o'clock in the morning and she wouldn't leave 'til 6 o'clock at night, so I felt like I had to be the exact same as her. You know, she was making one of her worksheets from scratch and because it was my first placement, I knew no different, so I was, like, right, this is how teaching is…*

Trainee B: *'Cause they are teaching you how to be a teacher, that's what they're doing.*

Trainee C: Yeah, they are.

Trainee B: They are modelling…we learn from what they do, they are modelling to us the whole time.' (Group 2)

And this can contribute to trainee withdrawal:

Trainee A: *'I knew no different, so I was, like, right, this is how teaching is and after PP2, I was, like, I don't really want to do teaching anymore and, you know, I think, if I've had have that throughout each placement, then I don't think I'd still be, like, where I am now.' (Group 2)*

Earlier, in Table 3, the variability in trainees experiences of managing their workload across all placements can be seen. From PP3 onwards and particularly by PP4, trainees are very aware of the impact upon their workload of different school contexts and cultures. The conversation below sums this up:

Trainee A: *And, you know, with, like, you said, like, a lot of people have had bad experiences and good experiences, so where you're at, how much help they give you, because, I mean, we are still learning, like, some people like me, haven't got…*

Trainee B: *…that guide and planning.*

Trainee A: *Yeah, haven't been in the school or anything, so it was, like, you, kind of, need someone to, kind of, tell you that, you know, this is what we need or what to do, at least guide you the right way, but if you haven't got that, then you're, kind of, stuck.*

Trainee C: *Yeah.*

Trainee A: *There'd be no managing workload you'd just go mental.*

Despite the increased workload on PP4, trainees also make reference to university culture on workload, for example, one trainee described explicit encouragement from her personal tutor to consider work-life balance:

> *'I've tried doing the work in the week and then try and have a little bit of me time, 'cause [tutor's name]said, try and have, at least, some time to yourself, like, 'cause it's obviously not good for, like, your mental health and everything..'.* (Focus Group 1)

Another trainee reflected on her choice of University, and workload/stress as part of her considerations:

> *'Yeah, I think you can see the workload difference when you talk about people you know that have done it [Warwick PGCE]and you have been in other Universities where they're really stressed out and they've said don't do it, whereas, now we've come to Warwick and it's [PGCE] not as stressful as everyone said it is. I think it might be that there is a difference in University as well, but this was my preference because of the support and the workload compared to the other two [Universities] that I picked…'* (Focus Group 2)

Summary:

- **The culture of both schools and the University are recognised by the trainees as having an impact of their workload. Both positive and negative impacts are described. The recognition of culture is important as developing new ways of 'doing things' takes time to embed. There are implications here for University Moderation Tutor training and training for school-based Professional Mentors and class teachers who work with trainees.**

CONCLUSION AND OUTCOMES

Reflection

Undertaking this research has been fascinating. The focus group methodology, listening to groups of trainees talking about their experiences, has added new and deeper information to that which we gain from our regular written evaluations of the programme. As a small team, it has been possible to implement changes during the year as well as planning changes for the next academic year. These changes are summarised below as project outcomes.

Dissemination of Interim findings:

- reported at the Warwick Education conference

- discussed internally for implementation

Planned dissemination

- Centre for Teaching Education, Staff Forum (Primary and Secondary)

- ITE sector through relevant conferences such as TEAN (Teacher Education Advancement Network).

- DfE - The workload solutions unit at the DFE has also expressed interest in the project.

Outcomes

Changes implemented whilst the project was in progress:

- **No requirement to produce written evaluations** Trainees reflect on their lessons and adapt/reflect with their CT/reflect with their Mentor

- **More explicit focus on discussing workload with trainees** Helping them understand what a 'reasonable' workload looks like i.e. you shouldn't be up till 2am working on your planning – not sustainable.

Changes following project completion

- **Discuss an earlier shift to weekly planning – approval by Mentor required (use of professional judgement** Trainees tell us this supports their planning – seeing progression across a week (makes a lot more sense) and is much more manageable.

- **initiating a full review of school-based tasks undertaken by trainees;** Particulary for PP2, to ensure that workload demands are reasonable

- **Recognition that in order to effect culture change around workload, communication around 'good practice' needs to be much more explicit** Placement Guides will aim to raise the profile of workload reform, feature a full page highlighting aims of workload reform and summarising advice and 'best practice' e.g. avoiding duplication – trainees shouldn't be duplicating workload e.g. planning on one format for school and another for University! How does you class teacher manage their workload?

- **Further liaison with University wellbeing services to offer customised, optional support for management of workload** As PGCE students spend at least 120 days (of a 180-day programme) in school they present as non-traditional students who typically find it challenging to access University support services. Staff liaison with wellbeing services

enables bespoke support to be offered to trainees at a time and location to suit their timetable.

- **Major review of 'PGCE pre-course handbook' including** more reasonable workload demands (bearing in mind that many recruited to the programme might be in full-time work); change of tone from 'mandatory' actions to 'self-evaluation' or 'advisory'; Increased personalisation – handbook structured around 'needs' identified at interview

- **Altering expectations in formal agreements between the University and the partnership schools where trainees undertake placements** the formal partnership agreement contract between schools and the University has been updated to clarify expectation about the 'guided supported planning' for trainees, as advocated by workload reform initiatives.

- **Sustaining/developing the timetable to increase study days – which were popular and supportive in managing academic workload.**

- **Sustain levels of personal tutor support which were identified as highly effective in helping to sustain trainees on a challenging programme.**

- **Review preparatory tasks for seminars for time demands, relevance and reference within the session.**

- **Consider how best to support trainees in accessing relevant resources to support teaching resource preparation**

- **Consider how best to support trainees in changing age-phase –** consider use of peer support – trainees who have experienced Key Stage 1, sharing their 'top tips' with Early Years trainees prior to their KS 1 placement.

- **Review training for school-based Professional Mentors and class teachers to** promote consistency of support from schools and share the message of workload reform

- **Review training for University-based Moderation Tutors to** promote consistency of support and embed the practices of workload reform

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