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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

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Jenny Gilruth MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

Dear Jenny,

Teacher Workload/Class Contact Time

I write regarding the ongoing teacher workload crisis in Scotland's schools.

In our most recent Big Question Survey, 40% of the teachers surveyed said that their workload had increased significantly over the last year and teachers' working hours are still significantly beyond the suggested 35-hour week. Administrative and clerical tasks were identified as the biggest driver of workload (the same as the previous year's survey), closely followed by data and assessment requirements. More teachers continue to feel disempowered and with a lack of control over their working lives, the opposite of what the empowerment agenda is supposed to achieve.

This is a crisis that has been known about for years and, of course, your party made a welcome commitment in its 2021 manifesto for the Scottish Parliament elections to reduce teacher class-contact time by 90 minutes per week. However, despite that commitment being enshrined in the 2021 Programme for Government, we are now more than halfway through the Parliamentary term with little evidence that this commitment will be met. Indeed, last week, you admitted that this promise would not be delivered in 2024-25.

In any circumstances, this would be extremely disappointing but, given that the workload pressures which prompted the manifesto promise in 2021 have only intensified as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic with, for example, issues around attendance and poor behaviour getting much worse, there needs to be a renewed urgency to fulfil the commitment to reduce teacher class-contact time. While we have welcomed your acknowledgments in recent meetings with NASUWT that giving teachers additional time could help to address some of the current challenges in the Scottish education system, in the absence of concrete and tangible actions many teachers are at or beyond breaking point: our most recent NASUWT Wellbeing survey of teachers in Scotland suggested that 9 in 10 of them report more work-related stress in the past 12 months and say that their job has adversely affected their mental health.

So, while calling for renewed vigour in bringing about a reduction in teacher class-contact time, we acknowledge that this cannot be done overnight and, in the meantime, other actions must be taken to tackle the workload crisis and deliver a better deal for teachers.

Unusually, England seems to have been more proactive in this regard and its Workload Reduction Taskforce has announced recommendations to address workload pressures, including "Reinserting a list of bureaucratic tasks that teachers and leaders should not be expected to do into the school teachers' pay and conditions document." As I am sure you are aware, Scotland had its equivalent list of clerical and administrative tasks removed from the SNCT Handbook in 2011 which could be similarly reinserted.

Indeed, as NASUWT has highlighted in meetings with you and your officials, Scotland had its own 'Workload Reduction Taskforce' in the Tackling Bureaucracy Working Group. Most of the workload drivers that were highlighted therein are still present today: Forward Planning, Assessment, Monitoring/Reporting and Improvement Planning. Many of the suggestions made in those reports could still be effectively implemented, with a renewed focus from Scottish Government and some pressure on and oversight of local authorities.

We would be happy to meet to discuss this further as addressing workload will positively contribute to making teaching an attractive profession and the Scottish Government must take action to support teachers to stay in the profession and thrive.

Yours Sincerely,
Mike Corbett
National Official (Scotland)